

**UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL  
GRADUATE STUDENTS IN A CANADIAN COLLEGE**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of international graduate students in a College at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada, in order to understand their motivations and academic and non-academic adaptations in a new environment. A case study design was employed and qualitative methods, utilizing semi-structured interviews with eight participants, informed by constructivist theory, was deemed the most appropriate approach to data collection and analysis.

Themes emerging from data analysis included motivations, relationships, hardships, and adjustments, confirming and deepening the findings of prior research on international students' experiences and highlighting the unique challenges faced by international students in this particular context. Data was also analyzed to articulate recommendations around improved institutional interface with international students, confirming the importance of targeted financial, academic and social supports.

By focusing on one site of internationalization this research provided deep insight into the experiences of a group of international students and enhanced understanding of the broader internationalization of post-secondary education from student and institutional perspectives. Potentially, the findings can inform the decision-making processes of international students and be mobilized for evidence-based policy making around recruiting and interfacing with international students in multiple post-secondary education contexts.

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## **Dedication**

I worship you almighty God, there is none like you.

That is what I long to do. I give you praise.

I could search for all eternity long and still find none like you.

To the Almighty God, my husband, my children, my late father,  
and to those who supported me in this journey.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

IS/ISs	International student/International students
ISSAC	International Student and Study Abroad Centre
PSE	Post-secondary education
U of S	University of Saskatchewan

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I present the background of the study and the statement of problem, which is a distinction between the objective of the research and the presentation of the research questions. Assumptions, delimitations and limitations of this thesis were presented, key terms were defined, the significance of the study and its potential contributions were also explored and an overview of internationalization at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) was provided.

### **Background**

My purpose in this thesis was to explore the experiences of international students (ISs) who came directly to one particular College of Interest at the U of S in Saskatoon, Canada for graduate studies. As an IS myself, it was my own experiences that triggered my interest in exploring this topic. I began to ask myself a series of questions, which included; why do ISs come to study at the College at the U of S; and why do ISs choose Canada as a destination for their studies? What positive or negative experiences do international students have in the College that they attend at the U of S? What supports does the College currently provide and what additional supports are necessary to ensure ISs are successful in their academic pursuits? How does pursuing answers to these questions improve our understanding of the internationalization of post-secondary education (PSE), from student and institutional perspectives? And finally, what insights does this case study provide into issues of brain drain/brain gain as a feature of internationalization, and the larger implications of PSE internationalization on global geopolitics, especially North-South relations.

Universities in Canada today attract a growing number of ISs. These students bring a range of benefits to the host institutions and the larger host society and, in return, the students

seek to meet their educational aspirations (Francis, 2003). The increasing IS population in Canadian universities is creating greater cultural diversity on campuses. According to Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002), there is an emerging body of international research that has shown that culturally diverse universities create rich and varied educational experiences that help students learn and prepare for participation in an increasingly diverse global workforce and society.

However, the choice to study in Canada may cause many challenges for ISs, including the stress of adjusting to an unfamiliar educational and socio-cultural environment and a dramatically different climate. ISs often experience stress more than domestic students, mostly due to the additional challenges posed by the adaptation process they have to undergo (Francis, 2003).

Many ISs experience culture shock moving to and living in another country. The degree of dislocation is related to how they are received by the host institutions, which is often determined by the kinds of societies they come from, and the cultures and values they bring. On the other hand, culture shock is a great opportunity for ISs to learn and acquire new perspectives, but sometimes an individual can experience real pain from culture shock (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Arkoudis et al., 2013). In addition to culture shock, problems like homesickness, language and academic barriers, financial difficulty, racism, or loneliness can arise (Gurin et al., 2002).

The geographical distance that separates ISs from family and friends back home can add to the difficulties of adjusting to a new environment. Hence, ISs do not deal with academic challenges alone, but also face multiple non-academic challenges (Jochems, Snippe, Smid, & Verweij, 2010). Although both international and domestic students experience adjustment difficulty academically, their experiences are fundamentally different in terms of citizenship.

The occasional sense of vulnerability that stems from not being a citizen of Canada has a great impact on the well-being of ISs (Dunne, 2009).

Most ISs encounter some changes when they come to Canada as they leave behind their loving and caring families and acquaintances. However, there is diversity among ISs as a small number of ISs come to join family members or acquaintances in Canada (Pidgeon & Andres 2005) Members of this small group frequently have strong culturally-affirming support systems in place to ease their adjustment. Given that fact, the experiences of ISs vary. For example, the exposure to diversity is most impactful for new ISs, as they seek to explore new ideas, social roles, and relationships. During this period, exposure to surroundings different from ISs' home environment increases the potential for their deep learning and critical thinking. ISs also face other significant challenges, including finding appropriate and affordable accommodation. There are also variations in weather conditions, knowing what to eat and where to shop for groceries. Independent living in distant country, thousands of kilometers away from their home countries, is also a common daily difficulty.

In addition to that, language barriers are another major challenge. Research suggests that language barriers are the greatest obstacle encountered by ISs, both academically and socially (Jochems et al., 2010). For instance, if an IS comes from a country where English is not frequently spoken, he/she may experience communication stress in Canada. Although ISs may already have some English language skills, there is an admission prerequisite for most ISs to pass certain exams such as TOEFL, IELTS, or GRE to satisfy the language requirement for study in any program in Canada (Esmaeili, 2002) However, because of the difference between the English learned in language class in non-English speaking countries and the colloquial and academic English used in Canada, when ISs reach Canada they may still find it difficult to keep

up with their Canadian classmates in their courses (Li, 2004) This situation causes stress and impacts the personal well-being and academic performances of ISs. Research conducted by professors at the University of Regina on language difficulties for ISs, concluded that students are being admitted with inadequate English language skills (Josh, 2013). The University of Regina doubled its IS population from 730 in 2009 to 1,448 in 2013. Josh (2013) also reported that the relevance of English tests used to admit students may be part of the problem. According to Josh (2013), most current English language proficiency tests, such as TOEFL or IELTS, are poor predictors of academic performance, possibly because the tests are written while much of what goes on in classes is oral.

ISs who study at the U of S are generally eager to integrate themselves into the faculty's culture, but some continue to find it difficult to integrate. Most ISs experience a transition from one educational system to another and encounter a new environment which impedes their educational success (Josh, 2013).

In addition to under-performance, poor grades can be caused by lack of language skills, lack of a diverse perspective in the curriculum, teachers' biases or lack of cultural awareness in disciplinary decisions (Josh, 2013).

### **Statement of Problem**

ISs encounter numerous problems in Canadian universities, including culture shock; challenges adjusting to Canadian English, lack of cultural awareness, loneliness, and low academic performance (Andrade, 2006). These problems represent a significant human and financial cost both to ISs and to the post-secondary institutions at which they study. To date there has been little research on the experiences of ISs at this particular institution. We can learn from this case study of ISs' personal and academic experiences both to benefit this specific



college and institution and to promote new understanding and improve outcomes for all actors in the internationalization of PSE.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to explore the motivations and the academic and personal experiences of international graduate students at one College of Interest at the U of S. Insights will inform policy at this institution and increase our understanding of the broader process of PSE internationalization.

### **Research Questions**

The main research questions for this study were:

- What are the motivations for ISs coming to study at the College of Interest at the U of S?
- What are the academic and non-academic experiences of international graduate students at the College of Interest?
- What current supports are available at the College of Interest and how are they utilized?
- What additional supports are recommended?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is a significant endeavor in achieving greater insight into the motivations and experiences of international graduate students attending the College of Interest at the U of S. By giving voice to ISs' lived experiences it acknowledges their diversity and uniqueness, honors their presence in the College, acknowledges their contributions to the institution and enhances their agency as valued members of the community. In addition to celebrating the growing presence of ISs, the research is helpful to faculty members to understand the needs of ISs and to

be more comfortable working with diverse groups of learners. The research offers recommendations on how to evaluate the experiences of ISs academically and non-academically and assist with evidence-based decision making around recruiting and interfacing with ISs both in the College of Interest and at the U of S. In this sense, the research serves as a guide to the College of Interest and the U of S. Research suggests that colleges and universities seeking to embrace diversity are currently discovering the benefit of continuous improvement processes (Rice & Taylor, 2003). Continuous improvement strategies enable institutions to realize improvements in three primary domains; services for students and stakeholders, processes to make it easier for employees to do their jobs, and institutional outcomes (Rice & Taylor, 2003).

Canada as a whole has a diverse, multicultural population. Because of this diversity, student populations in post-secondary institutions are becoming increasingly multicultural across the country. That diversity is been increased because of the commitment of many post-secondary institutions to recruit additional ISs. Many ISs adapt to challenges in host institutions, while some do not have the capacity or tenacity to deal effectively with them (Lee, 2010). Typically, those who migrate with high levels of education integrate faster.

### **Assumptions**

In this study, I assume that:

1. International graduate students have the ability to describe their experiences in the College of Interest.
2. Qualitative research will be the best method to document and to understand the experiences of ISs in the College of Interest.
3. The experiences of ISs are significantly different from domestic students.
4. The research has value and importance by enhancing understanding of the internationalization of PSE.

### **Delimitations**

The study is subject to the following delimitations:

1. The study will be delimited to international graduate students at one College of Interest at the U of S. Given that all respondents involved in the study are studying within this College of Interest, there are no assumptions of generalizability to ISs in other Colleges or universities.
2. The study will be delimited to ISs who come directly for graduate studies at the College of Interest at the U of S.

### **Limitations**

The study is subject to the following limitations:

1. The researcher was not able to make direct comparisons between Canadian students and ISs in the College of Interest.
2. The biases of the researcher may affect the interpretation of the data.
3. There is limitation on the researcher's ability to interpret accurately the perceptions of the respondents regarding experiences of ISs in the College of Interest.
4. The College at the University of Saskatchewan remains anonymous

### **Definitions**

**International Students:** These are students who come to study from abroad. By definition they do not have Canadian citizenship (Chen, 2008) ISs are extremely diverse people.

**Internationalization:** There are many definitions of internationalization. For the purpose of this study, internationalization refers to international activities and integration of an international,

intercultural or global dimension into teaching and learning processes in post-secondary institutions (Knight, 2004)

**Academic Experiences:** Academic experience is defined as any experience obtained in an academic environment.

**Non Academic Experiences:** This is an experience obtained outside of an academic environment.

**Culture Shock:** Culture shock applies to any situation where an individual is forced to adjust to an unfamiliar social system, and also refers to the anxiety of not knowing what to do in a new culture (Pyvis & Chapman 2005).

### **Research Context**

Since many of the experiences of ISs were context-specific, the following information on the research context was provided to frame understanding of the experiences of the participants under investigation. The College of Interest where the research was conducted is part of the U of S, located in Saskatoon, Canada. A city of 257,000 people in the Western Canadian province of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon is home to a number of post-secondary institutions and has an increasingly diversified economy based on agriculture, resource extraction, services and manufacturing (Garcea, 2006). A defining feature of the city and surrounding region is a continental climate with an extreme temperature ranging from +40 degrees in summer to -50 degrees in winter (Garcea, 2006). In part because of its harsh winter the province of Saskatchewan, despite an enormous land mass and abundance of agricultural land and natural resources, has a population of just 1.1 million people (Falihi & Cottrell, 2015) Approximately 18% of the population claim Aboriginal status and the remainder are descended predominantly from northern, central, and eastern European immigrants who settled the

Canadian prairies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Garcea, 2006). In recent years, the province and especially the city of Saskatoon has experienced rapid population growth and increased ethnic diversity through increased immigration stimulated by changes in provincial and federal immigration policy and a regional economic boom (Falihi & Cottrell, 2015; Garcea, 2006; Garcea, 2013).

The U of S is the largest education institution in the province of Saskatchewan and is the only Canadian university that has a partnership agreement with Oxford University (U of S Data Warehouse, 2016). Founded in 1907, the U of S is a Medical/Doctoral university that offers undergraduate and graduate degrees, diplomas, and certificates in nearly 200 fields of study. The student head count as of 2015/2016 is 20,349 while the IS head count is 2,394 (U of S Data Warehouse, 2016).

For the purpose of this research, “College of Interest” is not identified. This is mainly to protect the anonymity of participants and ensure that they would not be intimidated to share the reality of their experiences.

### **Overview of Internationalization at the University of Saskatchewan**

I was able to meet with the manager of the International Students and Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC) to discuss with him the history of internationalization at the U of S over the past ten years. That conversation included current international enrollment, services, and future goals related to the recently announced provincial strategy regarding targets for internationalization at the U of S.

Derek Tannis stated that the U of S has been formally involved in internationalization for the past ten years, but internationalization was not a large commitment until recently (Tannis,

personal communication, 2015). In 2005, there was an office responsible for exchanges, agreement, and delegations but internationalization was not the term people were using. The term internationalization is relatively new in describing international affairs (Knight, 2004). During the past decade it was just an additional good thing to be doing; it was not considered a necessity, and the International Students office at the U of S was relatively small with only three people involved with creating agreements to increase mobility. Many things were done around mobility and agreements for research. Faculty members were the ones initiating most of the work; for the most part, individual faculty members drove internationalization. (Tannis, personal communication, 2015).

In 2007, the university hired additional designated staff and the International Student Office was expanded. The College of Arts and Sciences also created an international liaison office with two staff and a program called Global Connect was established. There was a loose connection of units associating with internationalization. During this time, people began to get familiar with the word “internationalization” and with different interpretations from different authors. The number of ISs also increased, but internationalization still was not a significant institutional priority.

According to Tannis, the international center was expanded to include the Three Pillars of Global Relations in 2007 (Tannis, personal communication, 2015). The Study Abroad program was housed in Student Services and Research because there was no building to put everybody together. Everyone was in different offices. Currently, in the U of S there are two sites for internationalization: Student Services, Research, and Partnerships. They are not separated but Student Services have a different relationship to internationalization because internationalization requires a comprehensive approach like the employment center, health center, and library. There

are supports in all these centers that ISs can access. However, all services need to be adaptable. Tannis suggested that when we think of an international center for students, the whole of U of S should be like that because, comprehensively, it is an international institution (Tannis, personal communication, 2015).

Compared to the last ten years, the international center now has been reconstituted. Internationalization has gone from a small number of partnership agreements to hundreds of partnerships and the number of IS has increased significantly. The U of S is currently trying to reorganize how international services are provided to put clarity around the partnerships, and to integrate the concept of ISs' service to all units, because it is not possible for one office to do everything (Tannis, personal communication, 2015).

The current population of domestic and IS by level in the U of S is illustrated below:

**Table 1.1** U of S Student Population (University of Saskatchewan Data Warehouse, 2016)

International/Level	Winter Term			
	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016

<b>Domestic Student</b>	<b>Graduate Studies</b>	1,952	1,913	1,927	1,959
	<b>Non-degree Program</b>	301	294	263	296
	<b>Post Graduate Clinical</b>	406	414	420	423
	<b>Undergraduate</b>	15,572	15,460	15,304	15,276
	<b>Total</b>	18,231	18,081	17,914	17,954
<b>International Student</b>	<b>Graduate Studies</b>	947	1,026	1,059	1,046
	<b>Non-degree Program</b>	232	209	226	175
	<b>Post Graduate Clinical</b>		4	4	2
	<b>Undergraduate</b>	935	984	1,081	1,171
	<b>Total</b>	2,114	2,223	2,370	2,394
<b>Undeclared</b>	<b>Graduate Studies</b>	1	1		
	<b>Undergraduate</b>				1
	<b>Total</b>	1	1		1
<b>Total</b>		20,346	20,305	20,284	20,349



This data shows a gradual increase in the numbers of IS at Usask and also confirms that the majority of IS are enrolled in graduate programs.

The U of S attempts to provide academic and non-academic supports to all ISs enrolled at the institution. For central services, ISs receive the same services as any other students and all of these services are adaptable. For example, the Students Learning Services in the library is open to all students, but a large proportion of students who utilize these services are ISs (Tannis, personal communication, 2015).

In addition, academic supports like writing help, peer mentoring, study skills are run through Students Learning Services located in the main library. In addition, ISs use services at the U of S more than domestic students do. For instance, Health Services see a proportionally larger percentage of ISs in comparison to their domestic counterparts (Tannis, personal communication, 2015).

The whole university provides services for ISs in the institution. Upon arrival, there are services like housing, security, free hotel, and free taxi. There are also emergency financial supports for ISs having financial issues, though it is a small amount (Tannis, personal communication, 2015).

The province of Saskatchewan's plan for growth recognizes that international education is critical to maintaining and increasing economic growth in the province (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014). The recent provincial strategy respecting internationalization emphasized the benefits of internationalization for the future of the province and also acknowledged that ISs bring a new perspective to post-secondary educational institutions, which helps domestic students to develop as global citizens (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014). Internationalization increases the profile of the province globally, by helping secure Saskatchewan's future

competitiveness and sustainability (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014). In addition to increasing the number of ISs and domestic students studying abroad, the third goal of Saskatchewan's provincial strategy respecting internationalization is to grow global research partnerships by increasing the number and value of international research partnerships engaged in by the U of S (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014).

To accomplish all these goals, some policy initiatives were introduced in the International Education Strategy (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014). These included:

- Implementation of an annual international future scholarship, by sending up to 20 Saskatchewan students abroad for business- focused studies in priority markets.
- Re-establishing a post-secondary international education council to facilitate ongoing conversations and collaboration between government, post-secondary institutions and industry.
- Developing a provincial marketing strategy to brand Saskatchewan internationally and encourage more Saskatchewan students to study abroad, and attracting ISs to the province and partner with organizations (Government of Canada, 2014).

It is clear that in an increasingly diverse, globalized and inter-connected world internationalization is necessary for preparing students for careers in a global economy, enhancing national development and as a means of generating extra income for institutions. Socio-culturally, internationalization promotes inter-culturalism that is so critical for the social wellbeing of multicultural societies and improves the quality of post-secondary education by compelling institutions to rise to international academic standards. However, the greatest challenge in adopting an internationalization plan is the normal structure of the educational institution itself. Internationalization needs to be proactive, not reactive (Zezeza, 2012).

## **Summary/Conclusion**

The objective of this thesis, as presented in the research questions, was to explore the academic and non-academic experiences of international graduate students in a College of Interest at the U of S. Assumptions, delimitations and limitations of the research were analyzed and key terms defined. The research context was briefly described. The chapter concluded with a discussion on internationalization both as a global phenomenon and as a strategic priority for the U of S in the past decade.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter constitutes the literature review of my thesis where I synthesize some of the recent relevant research that has been conducted in the area of post-secondary internationalization and identify gaps in that research. I offer conceptions on motivations of internationalization in PSE, describing the various motivations of institutions and ISs for mobility. The chapter also introduces wider research on the experiences of ISs, highlighting the diversity of experiences in terms of language and academic barriers, culture shock, financial difficulty, and climate. Implications of growing diversity for ISs and faculty members will be examined by considering several tensions and difficulties for faculty members in trying to meet the learning needs of their ISs, and difficulties experienced by ISs in working with faculty members.

#### **Motivations for Internationalization**

Internationalization is the term used to describe the international or mobile dimension of PSE. Research suggests that the term means different things to different people and is used in various ways. For some people, “it means a series of international activities such as academic mobility for students and teachers; international linkages, partnerships and projects; new international academic programs and research initiatives” (Knight, 2007, p. 207). Knight’s (2007) definition of internationalization as “the integration of an international, intercultural and/or global dimension into the curriculum and teaching learning process” (p. 207) seems to be one of the most widely accepted.

## **Financial Considerations**

The imperative to generate revenue is one of the main motives for internationalization for profit and some non-profit universities seeking to tackle imminent financial problems (Altbach & Knight 2007). Moreover, many countries recruit ISs to earn profits by charging higher tuition fees. For instance, countries such as Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, and United States engage in this practice (Altbach & Knight 2007). Additionally, ISs boost broader local and national economies. “International students spend significant amounts of money in host countries; for instance, an estimated \$12 billion to the U.S economy” (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 292). Internationalization strategies are also part of wider positioning for competitive advantage, often measured by institutional rankings (Knight, 2006). Internationalization is considered to be an aspect of quality education; the higher the proportion of ISs, the higher the institution’s ranking. Strong universities attract ISs and become stronger with a perceived higher quality of education (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

## **Cultural Composition**

Developing countries also seek to attract ISs to their universities to improve the quality and cultural composition of their students and to fill labor market gaps. Research reported that Saskatchewan uses internationalization as a strategic way to recruit needed skill sets for economic development (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014). India and Philippines are significant host countries for students from other developing countries (Bhalla, 2005). However, individual ISs make their own personal decisions regarding the desired university and field of study. Crucially, most ISs fund themselves. According to Altbach and Knight (2007), personal resources constitute the largest fund for international education—not the governments, academic institutions, or philanthropies. Knight (2006) noted in a survey that the main motivations of

traditional nonprofit universities for internationalization are not financial. He concluded that internationalization is driven primarily by a desire to enhance research and knowledge capacity and to increase cross-cultural understanding and competency within their institutions.

### **Motivation of International Students**

#### **A Push-Pull Model**

The Push-Pull model is used to explain people's motivations for moving across boundaries to avail of educational opportunities. ISs are significantly motivated by push and pull factors when making the decision to come to a new society and institution. Push factors compel people due to different reasons to leave a particular place and go to some other place. Examples of push factors are low productivity, unemployment and underdevelopment, violence, plague, war, or poor quality of life. Pull factors are those reasons that encourage a person to relocate to a new place (Thet, 2000). Pull factors also attract ISs to an area or specific institution. Examples of pull factors are opportunities for better school and employment, financial support, higher wages, superior facilities, safety and security, better working conditions, attractive amenities, and family reunions among others.

Numerous researchers suggest that the growing appetite for international experiences as part of a quality PSE experience, as well as the increased income levels in some developing countries, have stimulated the increased demand for international higher education services (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Jianvittayakit, 2012).

#### **Attractiveness of Host Institutions**

The attractiveness of host institutions may also influence ISs' choice of a university. Country and university attributes are highly significant both in motivating ISs to choose to study abroad and in their choice of institutional destination (Thet, 2000). The host institution's

qualities generally influence the final stage of students' motivation in selecting a particular institution. ISs are also motivated by the immigration policies of various countries which dictate accessibility and capacity to ultimately secure citizenship. Chirkov (2009) and Zhou (2012) hypothesized that students who were pulled to study abroad typically experienced easier cultural adaptation than those who were pushed.

### **Self-Determination**

The motivation of various groups of migrants, including ISs, can also be successfully studied through the use of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2004). Deci and Ryan (2004) argued that the self-determination theory highlighted individuals' intrinsic tendencies to behave or reflect in a healthy way, and further stated that non self-determined people are often moved by external (extrinsic) factors such as reward systems, grades, evaluations, or the opinions they fear others might have of them. Deci and Ryan (2004) also claimed the more self-determined one's behavior, the higher the quality of one's performance in many domains including education, organizations, sport and physical activity, religion, health and medicine, parenting, virtual environments and media, close relationships, and psychotherapy.

Chirkov (2009) hypothesized that ISs with the self-determined motivation to study abroad would experience fewer obstacles in cultural adaptation than those with non-self-determined motivation. Chirkov, Safdar, De Guzman and Playford (2008) further examined the role that motivation played in the adaptation of ISs in Canada as a whole and collected data from the ISs at three Canadian universities. They found that the "motivation of international college students who go to a foreign country for studying is an important factor in predicting their adjustment" (Chirkov et al., 2008, p. 427).

International education in today's global world creates a variety of benefits for host

countries. It does this by creating new economic opportunities and more culturally sensitive and sustainable communities, by stimulating innovation and preparing the host institutions and societies for acquiring skills and capability to work globally and with diversity. At the U of S, international engagement fosters advanced educational opportunities for Saskatchewan students, supports stronger partnerships with international counterparts for provincial post-secondary educational institutions, and sustains Saskatchewan's educational and research profile globally (Tannis, personal communication, 2015). Thus, it is best practice for Saskatchewan to internationalize its PSE institutions' curricula and promote increasing mobility of Saskatchewan students and faculty members in post-secondary institutions to strengthen their international connections.

### **International Students' Experiences**

Internationalization is seen as a process that transforms the curriculum and the campus community by advancing intercultural competence, strengthening comparative knowledge of peoples and cultures, and encouraging global learning as essential to understanding the complexity of issues in the world today (Wisner, 1994). Internationalization at the institutional levels is defined as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education" (Knight, 2008, p. 20).

Internationalization occurs at both the institutional level and college level, but this study will focus on the college level. Much of the research literature on IS experiences focus on challenges such as language and academic barriers, culture shock, financial crisis, climate, racism, and other practical problems associated with learners changing environments.

### **Language and Academic Barriers**

Researchers argued that language barriers pose the greatest difficulty for ISs studying



abroad, and is the most likely factor affecting ISs' academic performance (Jochems, et al., 2010). ISs often experience difficulty understanding the instructors and reading materials, most especially if English is not their first language. They may find it difficult to comprehend what is being said by instructors or classmates in class. At times, some instructors may speak very fast while teaching and ISs may feel embarrassed to ask instructors to repeat what they said.

The language barrier is a big challenge for ISs, but overcoming this challenge could mean a beginning of successful integration in the host institution and society. Gaither and Griffin (1971) found that the younger the ISs, the fewer the adjustment problems, compared to older students. The language barrier sometimes will not prevent a student from experiencing success, but the anxiety will. It is not perfect language fluency that makes one succeed. It is the courage to face the challenges.

Abiddin (2007) revealed, "The reasons why students are unable to complete their studies within the time given are due to lack of supervision, commitment and language barriers" (p. 369). New ISs benefit from constant interactions with advisors or counselors.

### **Culture Shock**

The term culture shock was first introduced in 1958 to describe the anxiety of a person moving to a completely new environment (Guanipa, 1998). Culture shock applies to any situation where an individual is forced to adjust to an unfamiliar social system (Guanipa, 1998). Culture shock is common among ISs when coming to live in another country as they experience the feeling of not being aware of how to do things appropriately in a new environment.

Culture shock is a great opportunity for learning and acquiring new perspectives in a learning environment. Although an individual can experience real pain from culture shock, it is an opportunity for redefining one's life. An important dimension of culture shock is

asymmetrical power relations in which ISs have to adjust to the host society and not the other way round (Guanipa, 1998). The individual begins to realize that the new culture has good and bad attributes and starts to adjust and define him or herself and establish goals for life in the new environment. To an extent, both ISs and host institutions experience culture shock. It is a sudden and disturbing impression on both parties. In some cases, the experience of culture shock might even make ISs stronger. Some adapt more quickly and some need a longer time to adjust but most people overcome the difficulty if they perceive the new reality as better (Guanipa, 1998).

Many ISs suffer culture shock and other dislocation when coming to live in another country, but this is not the experience of all ISs. It seems that the experiences of ISs, including the degree of dislocation they face, depends in part on how they are perceived and received in the host institutions, the level of discrimination or acceptance that they experience and the resources they bring. The way one lives in one's native country may not be considered as normal in a new environment. So the greater the difference between the norms of the country of origin and those of the host society, the greater the likelihood and severity of culture shock (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland 2008). ISs experience real pain from culture shock but it is an opportunity for them to redefine their lives and it is also a great opportunity for ISs to learn and acquire new knowledge and skill sets.

The literature reveals some degree of culture shock is common for ISs when they arrive and begin their studies in a new environment (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). Culture shock is defined as a stress, anxiety, feelings of powerlessness, rejection and isolation (Oberg, 1960). Many ISs experience culture shock and find it hard to develop a balance between the two

different cultures (Kelly & Moogan 2012). However, being exposed to new values, attitudes, and behavior patterns is not always negative. Indeed, the experience can be transformative (Zhao et al., 2005).

### **Financial Difficulty/Hardship**

Financial difficulty is another experience ISs frequently face, most especially those who are solely responsible for funding themselves. ISs' tuition is often more expensive than domestic students' and ISs are frequently not eligible for Student Loans unless they are citizens or permanent residents (Tannis, personal communication, 2015). A new policy was implemented by the Canadian Government in 2014 that allows ISs to work part-time while studying, but with a restriction of 20 hours per week (Tannis, personal communication, 2015). While this provides greater opportunities for ISs, the regulations also impose restrictions as many employers would prefer employees who can commit to longer working hours. Although there are some possibilities for ISs to secure financial aid based on outstanding academic performance, there is limited funding to help ISs with financial challenges. Previous studies have also shown that financial pressures are the leading source of anxiety amongst ISs (Sherry & Chui 2010). Tuition, accommodation, and living expenses are costs that all ISs must face during the transition to a new country.

Many ISs do not know anyone in Canada, and are unfamiliar with the educational system and application process for scholarships, grants and other financial awards. Many are on tight budgets which limit their ability to participate in extracurricular activities. As an international student from Nigeria, I know some International students from Nigeria that have strict deadlines of when they must return to their homeland, these are those who have funding from Nigerian Government.

## **Climate**

Weather conditions can also be a significant part of the change experienced by ISs. Most especially, winter is the most challenging season for ISs in Saskatoon. For instance, ISs coming from a country such as Nigeria, with a very mild climate, including a temperate winter, find it difficult to adjust to the harsh Canadian winter. In my opinion as an international students; many ISs get discouraged with the weather in Canada, especially when it is colder than what they expected before they arrived. A survey conducted in 2007 by Statistics Canada asked immigrants what they disliked the most about living in Canada: 27% percent said climate, and 16% said Canada's weather is their greatest challenge. Climate was also identified as a greater challenge than lack of job opportunities (Chakma, 2010). Climate in Canada, most especially in Saskatoon, is one of the greatest challenges facing ISs. These include physical and psychological adjustments, the need for additional winter clothing, and transportation difficulties, since most ISs cannot afford personal vehicles and public transportation can sometimes be unreliable during extreme weather. This is what I encounter with many of my colleagues that are international students.

With an aging population, Canada faces significant demographic challenges in sustaining its work force. Thus, young, ambitious, and educated ISs are the kind of people Canada needs (Rekai, 2002). This is a motive for the recent Saskatchewan PSE internationalization strategy. According to Ziguras and Law (2006), ISs contribute significantly to the national and provincial economic development. They also provide important financial contribution that enables universities to undertake research and teaching activities. It is these kinds of incentives that lure ISs to remain in Saskatchewan or Canada after convocation, despite the harsh climate (Ziguras & Law 2006)

## **Brain Gain/Brain Drain**

The movement of skilled migrants to another country represents brain gain for the countries that reap the benefits of their skills and constitutes a loss to their home countries. Most countries currently position their immigration policies to attract the type of ISs and skilled migrants whose skills they desire (Beine, Docquier, & Rapoport 2008). This practice causes brain drain for the migrant countries of origin, where well-educated individuals leave their own countries and migrate to countries abroad for better education, salaries, wages, or living conditions (Beine et al., 2008). Hence, the migrants' countries lose those skilled people, or suffer a "brain drain", while the receiving country experiences a "brain gain" (Beine et al., 2008).

It is recognized that ISs enrich the learning experience for all domestic students (Chakma, 2010). For this reason, the Canadian government is also working hard to create additional opportunities for domestic students to study abroad, so they can expand their global awareness, cross-cultural experiences, and create international networks (Chakma, 2010). Also, international graduate students from Canadian universities are equipped with employable skills, knowledge, and a desire to contribute to communities. These skills make it easier for them to make Canada their home (Chakma, 2010).

Internationalization is a relatively new priority in Canada (Jones & Oleksiyenko 2011). Approaches differ from one province to the next; it is difficult to compare the internationalization policies of each province. Instead, it may be more beneficial to consider what each province can learn from the literature surrounding internationalization efforts. For example, Advanced Education Minister Kevin Doherty announced the launch of the Saskatchewan International Education Strategy on November 24, 2014 (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014). Doherty said the Government of Saskatchewan wants young people to

acquire the skills they need to work in a global context and strengthen the province's cultural and business expertise worldwide. This will help to build relationships with trading partners and increase investments and partnerships to keep the Saskatchewan provincial economy strong (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014). However, it is unrealistic to expect that all students will have an overseas experience.

In 2004, foundation and credit transfer programs started with students in China wanting Canadian university degrees (Altbach & Knight, 2007). This approach was utilized by the Canadian International Management Institute which represents the recruiting interests of 10 Canadian universities and colleges (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Students would be based in China for foundation studies, cultural adjustment, and language training for the first three years of the five year program and later continue their studies in Canada for the final two years if they meet grade requirements (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

A different approach was utilized in Australia where they assigned points based on the subject and market demand when awarding immigration points for educational credentials (Ziguras & Law, 2006). If the Australian economy had a shortage of a particular profession, additional points for that field could be awarded to attract immigrants who would fill the gap.

### **Diversity of International Students and Faculty Members**

ISs' experiences in adapting to diverse learning environments can be challenging because of different learning styles and different levels of English language abilities. The areas reported by most instructors where ISs may experience difficulties were similar to those identified by students themselves (Ryan & Hellmundt, 2003). Most faculty members are aware of the increasing diversity among students but often were not prepared and trained to deal with this (Bartell, 2003). However, some work hard and are willing to make changes to their teaching and

learning practices to be more inclusive (Ryan & Hellmundt, 2003). Instructors have mentioned several tensions and difficulties in trying to meet the learning needs of their ISs. Most faculty members see the different cultural backgrounds of students as a resource to broaden the thinking of all (Ryan & Hellmundt, 2003).

### **Summary/Conclusion**

International graduate students have different motivations for coming to study in English-speaking institutions explained by push and pull considerations, self-determination and attractiveness of the host institution. ISs need to be aware that any important life transition is likely to result in stress and discomfort. Depression and a sense of failure in the new environment should be recognized as one stage in the adjustment process, and not as a permanent feature (Pedersen, 2013). ISs should be reassured that other people had similar experiences and they survived, and even grew stronger from the experience.

Host institutions also are motivated for recruiting ISs, with financial imperatives and competition for rankings related to the provision of a quality PSE being the leading drivers. ISs are extremely diverse people with different cultural values and for them to be well integrated in the host institution, they need to adapt to the rules and policies of the of the host institution. If ISs want to attain a higher degree and pursue their goals, they need to adjust themselves in a foreign land, coping with the new situations and maintaining good grades.

Research identifies a need for greater diversity preparation and cross-cultural awareness among faculty members (Melnick & Zeichner, 1993). Increasing cultural diversity in the teaching profession makes ISs more comfortable while learning. Research has shown that many teachers in training view student diversity as a problem rather than a resource (Melnick &

Zeichner, 1993). Research suggests that prioritizing the hiring of international faculty significantly improves the experiences of ISs (Sleeter, 2001).



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Research Methodology**

This chapter focuses on research methodology, including research design, theoretical considerations, research questions, participant selection, method of data collection, coding, analysis of the data, and ethical considerations. I explored the experiences, motivations, and supports of international graduate students who come directly to the U of S and the College of Interest to study in order to enhance understanding of the larger process of internationalization of PSE.

To achieve these goals, the study was informed by the following broad research questions:

- What are the motivations for ISs coming to study at the College of Interest at the U of S?
- What are the academic and non-academic experiences of international graduate students at the College of Interest?
- What current supports are available at the College of Interest and how are they utilized?
- What additional supports are recommended?

### **Research Design**

The research method describes “sampling procedures, data collection procedures and any other procedures that are critical to the study” (Gall, Gall, & Borg., 2007, p. 54). In this study, a qualitative research approach was used. As a qualitative researcher, I assumed that the participants constructed social reality and that social reality is continuously constructed in local situations (Gall et al., 2007). “A qualitative research allows qualitative researchers to study

things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). As a researcher, I was interested in understanding the meanings the participants bring to their experiences as ISs.

This research study followed a case study design. “Case study is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a case over time, through detailed data collection and reports a case description and case-based themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). Case study was an appropriate approach to this research because it investigates a particular phenomenon within a specific context, particularly when it is difficult to separate the phenomenon’s variables from the environment (Merriam, 2009).

Case study allows the researcher to retain the holistic characteristics of real-life events while investigating empirical events (Schell, 1992). Additionally, a case study is an empirical inquiry which investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Schell, 1992) and it can be used to accomplish various aims such as to provide description, test theory or generate theory (Lincoln & Guba, 2002). The primary intent of this case study is to provide detailed description of the experiences of ISs in a particular context. My interest in this research is to provide description of a particular phenomenon (internationalization) by interrogating it within a particular setting or case (College of Interest). Lincoln and Guba (1985) claimed identifying boundaries within a case allows the researcher to set limits for the inquiry, to determine what information is and is not relevant and to determine who should be included and excluded. In this study, the case was bounded by a focus on internationalization as the phenomenon of inquiry and by the selection of research participants from one College of Interest at the U of S. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), naturalistic inquiry, otherwise known as constructivism, supports the use of purposive sampling where the principle is to identify a

sample that is representative of the context. “The object is not to focus on the similarities that can be developed into generalizations, but to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 201). Selecting eight international graduate students representative of the diversity of that cohort allowed for a bounding of the case study. This approach was appropriate for the study because it sought answers to questions situated in the lived experiences of participants within a specific and discrete context.

## **Sampling**

### **Purposeful Sampling**

Purposeful sampling was used in this study. Purposeful sampling requires access to “key informants in the field who can help in identifying information-rich cases” (Suri, 2011, p. 4). I used purposeful sampling to identify and contact the informants. Purposeful sampling enables the qualitative researcher to select individuals who can best provide data and insights to understand and answer the research problem of the study. The participants were selected by gender; four males and four females with different skin color (dark, brown and light skin color), and from different countries and ethnicities: Nigerian, Iranian, Chinese, South Sudanese, and Native American. Participants are international graduate students who come directly from their home country to study at the College of Interest in the U of S.

### **Snowball Sampling**

Snowball sampling was also used to identify and contact the informants. This sampling technique identifies cases of interest from people who know people and cases that are information-rich for the research (Creswell, 2007). Snowballing allowed participants to suggest other appropriate participants for the researcher to invite to participate in data collection.

However, there are ethical implications of snowballing. In particular it might put inappropriate pressure on participants to agree to participate in a study.

### **Participants**

The participants targeted for sampling were eight international graduate students enrolled in the College of Interest who came from a variety of different countries of origin and included both males and females. The rationale for choosing eight participants was for the research to yield sufficient data that allowed me to deeply explore and substantively document a wide range of experiences (Travers, 2001). All the participants had been in Saskatoon for at least one year and were available to provide feedback immediately, a practice recommended by Lincoln & Guba (1985). The participants were selected by gender; four males and four females with different skin color; dark, brown and dark skin, and from different ethnicities including Africans, Asians and Indigenous peoples.

### **Constructivism**

The use of constructivism was appropriate in this study. Constructivism is a theory of knowledge and explains how people learn and generate meaning from interaction between experiences and ideas. It argues that people construct their own understanding through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. Eichelberger (1989) described the constructivist researcher as a person who wants to know what meaning people attribute to activities and how it is related to their behavior.

As a constructivist researcher and IS studying in a Canadian College, this research topic is of great personal interest to me. Given (2008) defined researchers as an integral part of the research. This means my research views and capabilities would be different from other researchers who have not have had similar experiences. The knowledge of reality to be co-

constructed in this study is similarities and differences in ISs' experiences within and outside the College of Interest.

### **Emic Approach**

Because of my background as an IS I adopted an emic approach to conduct this study. The terms originated in linguistics and anthropology in the 1950s and 1960s and over the following decades researchers in numerous fields and disciplines, including education, have found the concepts useful (Godina & McCoy, 2000).

An emic approach is sometimes referred to as research done by an insider. Godina and McCoy (2000) explained, from an anthropological perspective, "Emic constructs are accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the native members of the culture whose beliefs and behaviors are being studied" (p. 130). The emic approach is often used when researching topics that have not yet been heavily theorized.

In this study, having similar experiences as the participants who are ISs, I am defined as an emic researcher. Ortner (2006) described the advantages enjoyed by emic researchers that, when a researcher already established relationships with the research participants the nature of the investigation is a different situation from where the researcher has no previous connection before entering the field. It is easier for emic researchers when conducting field work to gain access to people and resources. This is true for this research as I possess these strategic benefits. In this study, it was not challenging for me to identify and select the participants who are ISs like me. Participants were more comfortable sharing their experiences with me as an emic researcher. As a result of all this, I bring great strength to this study as an emic researcher.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Positionality describes the researcher's view and the position they have chosen to adopt in relation to a specific research task (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). This section focuses on my background. My name is Olawunmi Adeyemi. I am a 32-year-old international Masters student in the Department of Educational Administration in the College of Education at the U of S. I am from Nigeria. My journey so far in the U of S has been a source of great fulfillment for me. I had always wanted to study abroad to gain a better perspective of the world beyond the shorelines of my home country where I have lived and studied all my life. The eight months processing time required to process a Canadian study permit in Nigeria made me discouraged in my quest to study in Canada. I chose the U of S as my Masters degree destination because of the reasonable tuition fees compared to other institutions offering the same or similar courses globally.

I hold a Bachelor's Degree in Educational Management with outstanding grades that gave me a huge advantage to secure an admission to the College of Education. Upon my arrival in Canada, like other ISs, I was faced with the difficult task of finding affordable accommodation reasonably close to the U of S. The harsh winter made the adjustment more challenging for me as I had left a beautiful and sunny Africa behind me. Loneliness was unexplainably painful as the varied time zones made it difficult to communicate with friends and family members back home. Despite these challenges, I was more dedicated to my academic work due to motivations and supports of my husband who was also studying abroad in Europe. Instructors in the College of Education also helped me adapt to my new environment. Within a few months of study, I was connected to a church network where I met many Africans. I was able to adapt more with their support and I also made friends from different nationalities and backgrounds that improved my

interpersonal and communication skills. In addition to that, I received a scholarship for two academic terms which made life a bit easier for me. My husband was able to relocate to Canada as the spouse of an IS on an Open Work Permit and we are thankful to Citizenship and Immigration Canada for such an initiative.

As an IS in the College of Education, I have heard my peers from various countries other than Canada complain about how language barriers impede their chances in obtaining better academic grades. Another challenge posed by inadequate language skills was the inability of ISs to easily engage in classroom discussions. In the College of Education, it is imperative to express oneself in order to get involved in class discussions and other interactive sessions. These abilities are recipes for success in an academic career but most ISs keep silent during such sessions. In my personal experience as an IS in the U of S, despite that my first degree was completed in English Language Studies, coupled with the fact that English is my country's official language, I found interactive communication in the classes difficult to overcome. Frequently, in my first term in the University, there were times I had nothing to express in my initial classes and the major cause of this was that I did not possess the same degree of fluency of language as native speakers. However, the desire for me to be who I am and the willingness to express myself without comparing my language skills with native speakers, enabled me to improve my skills as time went on.

My life as an IS led me to develop this research topic. As a researcher, my years of study as an international graduate student in the College of Education have given me an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the experiences, challenges, and limitations existing among international graduate students.

### **Researcher Biases**

According to Johnson and Christensen (2008) researchers must be open to findings that contradict the researcher's previous assumptions and challenge their expectations of the outcomes of the study. Emic researchers in qualitative research show a tendency for incorporating personal experiences and perceptions into their studies. My experiences as an international graduate student in a Canadian College clearly influenced some of my assumptions in this research. But I also did my utmost to not allow those assumptions to influence the data collection or analysis process. Similarly I did my utmost when coding and analyzing the data to honor the perspectives and experiences of my participants as shared in the data. In this way I sought to maximize the advantages while minimizing the disadvantages of my positionality as an emic researcher.

### **Collecting Data**

There are several methods for collecting data in qualitative research. These include observations, visual analysis, and interviews. However, the method I used for collecting data and exploring the experience of ISs in the College of Interest was interviews. "The major advantage of interviews is their adaptability" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 228) and they allow skilled interviewers to build trust and rapport with participants and produce rich data. Additionally, the purpose of interviewing was to find out what is in or on the participant's mind (Patton, 1990). Interviews were deemed the best way to collect data to answer the research questions and facilitate understanding of the meanings the participants bring to their experiences as ISs.

For the purpose of this research, semi-structured interviews were used to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and motivations of ISs on academic and non-academic matters. Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) stated that the "semi-structured interview is neither an open



conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire” (p. 27). It is conducted according to an interview guide that focuses on certain themes and may include suggested questions. Semi-structured interviews consist of main questions that help to describe the areas to be explored, and allows the interviewer or participants to pursue an idea or response in detail. It also provides participants with some guidance on what to talk about, which many of the participants find helpful. It also allows the researcher to explore deeply the individual experiences of participants. The interview is therefore the most appropriate data collection method where detailed insights are required from individual participants. I conducted eight separate interviews with eight individuals. Each interview took approximately 1.5 hours in length for a total of 15 hours of semi-structured interviews. I transcribed the interviews, and the written text, together with the tape recording, was the basis for the subsequent data analysis and meaning making.

The methodology that was used in the research enabled me to obtain answers to my research questions (McNeill & Chapman, 2005). In qualitative research, good questions should require more than a true or false answer (McNeill & Chapman, 2005). The questions were designed to produce more than yes or no answers. It was important to start with questions that participants could easily answer to help participants build up confidence and rapport; this process often generates rich data that subsequently develops the interview further.

Before an interview takes place, each participant was informed about the study details and given assurance about ethical principles, including the rule of anonymity and confidentiality, the purpose of the study, data collection, and plans for completion of the final report (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). This gave participants an idea of what to expect from the interview. After they agreed to participate in the study, I gave each participant a consent form to

confirm their willingness. After each participant signed the consent form, I provided them with answers to any further questions that they may have had.

According to Gill et al. (2008), interviews should be conducted in areas free from distractions and at times and locations that are most suitable for participants. For the participants in this study, the interviews were conducted in an empty lecture room free from distractions. Establishing rapport with participants prior to the interview was also important as this can also have a positive effect on the subsequent development of the interview (Gill et al., 2008). There was a good rapport with participants prior to each of the interview.

Furthermore, to ensure that the interview is as productive as possible, researchers must possess a collection of skills to ensure that comprehensive and representative data are collected during the interview (Gill et al., 2008). One of the most important skills is the ability to listen attentively to what the participant said. I listened carefully and the participants were able to recount their experiences as fully as possible, without unnecessary interruptions. I allowed the participants to be aware of the recording and I also adopted encouraging body language, nodding, smiling, and making encouraging noises during the interview. Other skills I used were reflecting on remarks made by participants, and also seeking clarification from participants if their response was unclear.

At the end of the interview, I expressed appreciation to the participants for their time and asked them if there is anything they would like to add. This invitation gave participants an opportunity to deal with issues that they might have thought about, or thought were important but were not dealt with by the interviewer. This can often lead to the discovery of new, unanticipated information. As mentioned earlier, all interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim subsequently, as this protects against bias and provides a permanent record

of what was said and what was not said. I made some notes during and immediately after each interview about observations, and thoughts and ideas during the interview, as this helped in the data analysis process. When conducting research with respondents, there are many important ethical issues that were considered. For instance, one of my participants was motivated to study at the U of S because of her boyfriend, but was not comfortable seeing it in the transcript, so it was deleted. I had an intense interest in avoiding personal views and circumstances that can potentially put the participants at risk of exposure and embarrassment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

### **Data Analysis**

This section explains how the data was analyzed. In this study, I analyzed the transcripts and coded them to identify themes in the data. After the data has been collected and transcribed, interview transcripts were summarized and synthesized in order to facilitate interpretation.

Creswell (2007) explained that the researcher builds evidence for the explanation through the codes and themes that come out from the various participants of the study or other sources and confirm validity. I avoided data analysis until all the interviews were completed. The process of data analysis helped me to identify common themes among the participants that were studied. Re-reading the research proposal and data collected enabled me to organize the data topically.

### **Coding**

“Coding is one of the significant steps taken during analysis to organize and make sense of textual data” (Basit, 2003, p. 144). Coding is the process of organizing and sorting data. In relating data collection and interpreting the data, coding becomes the basis for developing the analysis. Kelle & Bird (1995) viewed the role of coding as noticing relevant phenomena;

collecting examples of those phenomena; and analyzing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns and structures.

The coding method appropriate for case study, as preferred by Miles and Huberman (1994), is to create a provisional ‘start list’ of codes prior to fieldwork that comes from the list of research questions, hypotheses, problem areas and key variables that the researcher brings to the study. My prior knowledge of the subject matter, information from ISSAC and insights from the literature review helped me to create these codes. The codes were created from a start list of codes beginning with the research questions, then encompassing the interview questions, and finally encompassing the transcribed data. I read and became familiarized with the data, and generated a list of ideas about what is in the data, and what was interesting about the participants. After that had been done, the initial code from the data was produced. “Code identifies a feature of the data that appears interesting to the analyst” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 7). At this point, the main themes in the data emerged. These included motivations, relationships, hardships, adjustments and recommendations.

### **Triangulation**

A triangulation approach was introduced in this study. “The data triangulation process involves using different sources of information in order to increase the validity of a study” (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2013, p. 25). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) quoted Janesick (1998) who explained, “Triangulation as the use of multiple researchers, multiple theories, or perspectives to interpret the data; multiple data sources to corroborate data and multiple disciplines to broaden one’s understanding of the method and the phenomenon of interest” (p. 110). Triangulation was achieved by combining participants’ interview data, my experiences as an IS, information from the ISSAC manager, and insights from the literature review.

Triangulation enhanced the credibility, reliability and trustworthiness of the research, exploring the experiences of international graduate students in a Canadian College.

### **Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that trustworthiness includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Based on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) suggestion, maximum trustworthiness was explored in this study, as a researcher and through the data collection and analysis processes. Member checking is also a means of establishing trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described member checks as "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314) in a study, the participants themselves confirm the accuracy of the transcripts. Every effort was made to ensure trustworthiness both in the collection and analysis of data in this study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

To protect participants from emotional and physical harm, I received ethical approval from the U of S Behavioral Research Ethics Board prior to data collection. Prior to the data collection, I obtained consent from participants; the participants were thoroughly briefed on the ethics and the purposes of the study and each question was reviewed in detail with the participants to ensure they clearly understand their rights, the question being asked and the possible answers I might receive. Ethical procedures state that participants have the option to not participate in the interview or to withdraw from the study at any time. However, no participant withdrew from the study. All participants completed the interviews and their identities (names or department) remain confidential. At the end of the interview each participant was given the opportunity to review the transcription of the interview and provided a written consent to use the information provided. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were ensured with

pseudonyms in reference to each of them. This procedure minimized any potential risk to the participants or the outcome of the study. Consequently, all participation was voluntary.

### **Summary/Conclusion**

In summary, “Understanding the experiences of International Graduate Students in a Canadian College” was an interesting topic for me because of the similarities between my experiences as an IS and those of my participants. Participants were made comfortable to share their experiences with me as an emic researcher. I used a qualitative case study approach as the best means to understand the experiences of ISs in the College of Interest. I used purposeful sampling to identify and select participants, and semi-structured interview questions to collect data. Participants were made comfortable to share their experiences with me as an emic researcher. I used triangulation in the data analysis process, and followed Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) suggestions on trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research. The data collection and analysis procedure strictly followed the ethical procedures provided by the U of S. The research was conducted after receiving ethical approval from the U of S Behavioral Research Ethics Board prior to data collection.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Introducing the Participants and Presenting the Data**

By employing a case study approach and qualitative methods to collect data from eight participants, this study was undertaken to understand the experiences of international graduate students in a Canadian College. In this chapter, I reported the results of interviews conducted with eight participants and the results of a preliminary coding of the data. The interviews occurred in a quiet lecture room free from distractions at the U of S and each of the participants was interviewed for approximately 1.5 hours. The interviews were tape-recorded and the participants were instructed that the recording of the interview could be discontinued at any time. The recorded interviews were transcribed and a copy of the transcript was sent to each of the participants to add, delete or change any part of the transcript.

Transcript release forms were given to the participants to sign after they had reviewed and confirmed that the transcript accurately reflected what they said during the interview. For confidentiality, a pseudonym was used for each participant and they were given the following nicknames: Adiam, Blair, Carson, Dana, Emily, Faith, Gideon and Haakon. Ortner (2006) described the advantages enjoyed by emic researchers that, when a researcher had already established relationships with the research participants, the nature of the investigation is different from where the researcher has no previous connection before entering the field. It was easier for me as an emic researcher when conducting fieldwork to gain access to people and resources and to put the participants at ease during the interview process.

The case study was compiled by semi-structured interviews and all participants provided rich and valuable data. Case study is appropriate to this research because it is a means of investigating a particular phenomenon within a specific context, particularly when it is difficult

to separate the phenomenon's variables from the environment (Merriam, 2009). The main benefit of case study in this research was that it allowed me to explore deeply the phenomenon of internationalization in a unique context.

After the data has been collected and transcribed, the process of data analysis commenced. The data provided were organized and sorted through the process of coding for the identification of themes. Table 4.1 provides a demographic profile of participants identifying their names, gender and programs enrolled at Usask.

**Table 4.1** Demographic Profile of Participants

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Year of Study</b>	<b>Level of Study</b>
Adiam	Female	2nd	PhD
Blair	Male	3rd	PhD
Carson	Male	2nd	Master
Dana	Female	3rd	PhD
Emily	Female	2nd	Master
Faith	Female	2nd	Master
Gideon	Male	2nd	Master
Haakon	Male	2nd	Master

This data reveals the ethnic, gender and programmatic diversity of participants.

### **Description of Transcribing Interviews and Coding Data**

The interviews were transcribed using a portable tape recorder. It was rigorous to transcribe, because I had to rewind a bit of tape after each stop and frequently go back to get an understanding of what was said. The data was collected through transcribing the recorded



interview with the eight participants. After the data were collected and transcribed, the process of data analysis commenced in search of patterns through inductive analysis.

The inductive analysis process organizes the data collected into categories through coding, and identifies relationships and patterns or themes based on the categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). As previously stated triangulation was achieved by combining participants' interview data, my experiences as an IS, information from the ISSAC manager, and insights from the literature review.

Trustworthiness was ensured by having the participants check the accuracy of the transcripts, and allowing them to delete, add or modify any part of the transcription that was not accurate. The participants also checked the interpretations that occurred during the interview, and any parts of the interpretation that were not consistent with the participants' real opinion were modified. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that trustworthiness includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### **Participants' Voices**

#### **Adiam's Voice**

Adiam is an Indigenous student. Her motivation for coming to the U of S was to further what she knew, and to challenge herself to see if there was any more she could do. As an administrator she thought she had more flair for policies. "It sounds like a simple riddle, but easier said than done". Therefore, her major motivation was to challenge herself to further what she knew. For Adiam, English is her second language, as her first language is Navajo. But she grew up largely in an English speaking environment. The problem that she did run into had to do with synthesizing information. Being unable to speak her language saddens her. But over all,

she was okay with English and she did not mind speaking in front of people. Nevertheless, over all, she was okay with English and she did not mind speaking in front of people.

### **“University is a scary world”**

She described her academic experiences as challenging. Her academic experiences are challenging. There are people to support her but she did not feel there is enough support academically. Sometimes she remembered that she is a graduate student at a certain level and expected to be independent. She had four children and always tired easily with housework. The responsibilities were heavy for her because of the way she handled her responsibilities as a mother. “I made my life hard by trying to reach the expectations that I set for myself”.

Adiam is not confident in mathematics and she did not like to work with numbers. She had difficulty with one of her courses involving calculations. She said her parents’ background did not help in this regard. Her father did not go beyond high school level, and her mother went beyond high school level but she did not finish her undergraduate degree. Therefore, she thought if she had a person who was more educated in her family, it would have been different and easier in some ways.

Non-academic activities were her strong point. She got involved in graduate student associations to represent people who were new in Saskatoon or new students in University. She was involved with many of the Aboriginal and Native American students’ events, and all these got her connected with lots of people in the University. One thing that she loved about the University is that they care for anything that has to do with Native people and she was happy to see that. She played volleyball and basketball as well. Moreover, she had two domestic students who were classmates. She was not sure if they are friends. She only had time talking and chatting with them once, and it was all students and staff together as a cohort. She is always

missing home in the USA, but her husband thought they could reside in Canada after her study. “I am going to be miserable living in Canada but I’ll live through it”.

**“It was first hand experiences for me”**

Her experiences with faculty members were generally positive. She said they encouraged her and told her often that if she needed help she should tell them. “Faculty members were always willing to help”. She said the faculty members have good teaching skills. They brought special guests that spoke on certain aspects like research processes. It was through an actual research process seminar that she learned about people who actually had previous experiences in what she was going through. It was firsthand experience for her and talking to people who were doing a good job in their research works was a source of motivation for her. Adiam had a good experience with the non-faculty members. She said they handled situations in the department well through communication.

**“It was not enough but helped”**

Adiam received support from colleagues, and she greatly appreciated those who encouraged and motivated her. The College of Interest also provided bursaries for her that were intended for her tuition. This was not enough for her but it helped. She counted on the money every term. “At the beginning of the year, these scholarships are very supportive”.

Adiam had not visited another country apart from United States where she lived before she came to Saskatoon. Her recommendations were a monthly get-together for dinner in the College of Interest. In addition, she felt the College of Interest should keep up the bursaries and scholarships and provide them for a longer period of time. These are the kind of academic supports she thought would be beneficial to all students.

## **Blair's Voice**

### **“It is a blessing I came study at a Canadian College”**

Blair is an African student. His motivation was when a friend came to the University and told him that there was a program for international studies, he advised him to enroll. His supervisor during his Master's degree also advised him to enroll in the PhD program and assured him that he would assist him morally. They speak Zande in his country and English is his second language. But his high school was founded by the British, so the English language was not hard for him and he had been a reader all his life.

Blair said it was a blessing that he came to study at a Canadian College and ended up learning so many new theories. He felt this made him wiser and more knowledgeable. He said most of the instructors taught well. He knew two professors who were hard markers, so he prepared for them during the exams so when he got lower marks in their courses it did not bother him much. Currently, Blair is completing his PhD. Most of the readings are complex articles and it is challenging for him.

His non-academic experiences included outdoor activities. Sometimes, professors invited him to their homes for lunches and dinners. He liked to learn about new cultures. He had been to Aboriginal cultural performances, and observed their ways of life. Some friends also invited him to events that have to do with fund raising and charity. He performed in these events by playing guitar. He also goes to church where he meets with different people from different countries. He said Canadian culture is very individualistic. “When you enter the class you feel you want to engage with the students especially after the class. But when the class finishes everyone just leaves”. He said sitting near somebody did not mean interaction will occur, so it took him time to adjust. He still misses Africa where he gets along with people so easily. “It

was tough relating with domestic students at first, but I later made friends with them”. However, he preferred to do his teamwork with other Africans, because he thought he might say something that would offend people from other cultures.

Blair planned to reside in Canada after study. He said his country has been at war for a long time, and he is not planning to relocate back home. He saw his future here now. He would like to teach and empower the youth after completing his study.

### **“The experiences were sad but also positive”**

His experience with faculty members in his College was different from what he expected, owing to a huge cultural difference between Canada and his home country. In Africa teachers are seen as very influential, but in Canada instructors are more modest and approachable. He said if you call them “sir”, they also call you “sir” and when they did not know anything, they say I do not know. But in Africa, the teachers are assumed to be all knowing as a result of their being placed on a high cultural pedestal. His experiences with the faculty members in the College of Interest really trained him to be modest, regardless of his academic status. He received strong support from his supervisor who mentored and encouraged him. Other professors in his department did the same. In addition, he received support from scholarships and grants. However he felt that financial support was not adequate.

Blair had a good experience with non-faculty members. He was a sociable person who engaged all those he met. He said most cleaners in the College of Interest felt other people were looking down on them, but “I do laugh with them and they are comfortable with me”. Blair had previous experience from another country different from his home country before coming to Saskatoon. He stayed in another African country different from his country of origin for years, where he used to watch television and read newspapers, something he did not use to do in his

home country. Another thing he experienced in the African country was poverty which motivated him when he came to Saskatoon. “The experience was sad but also positive”. Another experience he had, helped him to understand more about the African continent.

Blair’s recommendations were that the College of Interest should hire a teaching assistant who would help students with improving their writing skills and to guide ISs in answering questions they might have to help adapt them to Canadian learning environments. He said the quality of education can be improved, and that it is a good thing if the College of Interest benchmarked best practices and standards from leading educational institutions globally. Another recommendation he gave was that most of the instructors in Canadian Colleges were Canadian-born faculty who had little previous international experiences. He recommended a form of multicultural seminars for faculty members and also suggested that the University would benefit from hiring more international faculty.

### **Carson’s Voice**

Carson is a Masters student from Africa. His motivations for coming to the U of S are because of the competitive tuition and affordable cost of living in Saskatchewan. He felt that ISs can comfortably settle in Saskatchewan and study. He checked Canadian universities’ ranking before choosing the U of S and realized that the school is one of the highly ranked schools in Canada. His English proficiency is good and he did not have difficulty speaking or understanding academic English.

Carson’s academic experience in the College of Interest is different from where he came. “Students are more interactive here and the instructors are very supportive to international students”. His non-academic experience is mainly working off campus to support himself through graduate school. He did not have much time for social life but he is planning to start a

swimming class this summer. However, he enjoyed his work place and said that it is always a pleasure going to work.

His relationships with domestic students are good. He preferred to interact with the domestic students because they have Canadian experience academically and technologically, and he saw them as very accommodating and friendly. Carson had a plan to reside in Canada after study because he thought Canada is better than his country in terms of more job opportunities, safety and security, and offers an overall better quality of life.

**“They always take their time to explain everything I do not understand”**

He had different experiences working with two faculty members. He learned a lot working with them. Initially he was frustrated with them but later realized they wanted the best out of him. “They always take their time to explain everything I do not understand”. Because of the good relationships with faculty members he was able to walk into their offices without booking an appointment and they were always willing to help. He had no support from the College of Interest financially but academically, he received all the supports he needed to succeed.

Giving his recommendation to the College of Interest he said that there should be additional funding, especially for students with good academic performances. “Then they would not have to work in three places before they can pay their tuition”. He said a subsidized residence by the U of S could also help ISs in getting affordable accommodation. In addition, he recommended a multicultural grocery store within the campus since “multicultural grocery stores in Saskatoon are far from the University”. He also suggested that paintings and other visuals that reflected different cultures should be displayed in the University to give ISs a sense of inclusion.

## **Dana's Voice**

Dana is an Asian student. Her motivation to come was because her brother lived here in Saskatoon for about ten years. Her department also inspired her. The first time she visited her department, she had the chance to talk to the head of department at that time regarding her intention to study and she was very motivated after their discussion. English is her second language but she had the opportunity to study English when she was a child. Coming to Canada was an additional opportunity for her to improve her English language skills. She had an English test before coming to Canada and she scored more than the required points.

### **“Everything is all about studying”**

Her academic experience was difficult when she started studying at the U of S. She took a few courses at the Master's level to upgrade for her PhD. This helped her to acquire a number of skills including leadership skills, organizational skills, and practice and implementation of policy. Interactive sessions with peers in class helped her to communicate and share experiences on academic background with each other. In addition, she felt that the instructors' teaching skills were excellent.

She had strong family bonds which provided emotional support but did not help her make friends in the new environment. In addition, a majority of the students studying at her College were teachers, who did not have a chance to come to the College except when they have classes. “Everything is all about studying”. She expressed that she had almost zero non-academic experiences.

Her relationships with domestic students are good. She realized domestic students are supportive and she is comfortable in class talking with them. “Everyone in class have their own accent, I do not worry about my English that much, as long as I can communicate and they can



understand”. She said if the instructors gave them an article to summarize together they are quickly done summarizing, so it was a great experience sharing information with domestic students. She planned to reside in Canada after study. Currently she is studying her PhD with the intention of getting a good job in Canada. But again she was concerned about her future as getting a good job in Canada can be difficult.

**“All the faculty members got my back”**

She worked as a research assistant and this helped her to learn a lot and to be an independent researcher. She had a good relationship with all the staff working in her College. She had been around for over two years now, so she knew most of the non-faculty members, and they knew her as well. She felt that “all the faculty members got my back” and she is grateful.

**“My mom is providing me extra financial support. If not, how can I live?”**

Dana’s main concern is that her College did not have sufficient financial resources to adequately support graduate students. Most students received little support and while some students received tuition bursaries these did not necessarily cover tuition costs for a whole year. Fortunately, she was receiving financial support from her mother. “My mom is providing me extra support, if not. How can I live”. But she stressed that many students were not so fortunate to have family members to call upon, and that this was a huge area of stress for many ISs in her College.

**“It means we are not on our own”**

In addition to better financial support while in their programs Dana recommended that the College should provide additional career planning information for ISs on what they can do with their degree after graduation and connect ISs with professionals outside the College to find job opportunities. From her perspective many ISs came to the College in order to leverage

careers in Canada after graduation, and additional support from the College in this area would mean that “we are not on our own”. Similarly, she suggested that there should be support for PhD students to attend international conferences to present their work in order to improve their chances of securing faculty appointments. She thought finances are the biggest challenges in her College, and felt strongly that something has to be done to improve this situation.

### **Emily’s Voice**

Emily is also an Asian student. Her motivation to choose the institution was because the U of S is one of the top fifteen universities in Canada and she felt the school’s reputation is strong compared with other institutions. In addition, tuition and the cost of living in Saskatchewan are low compared to other provinces in Canada. Therefore she was motivated by the reputation of the University and affordable cost of living in Saskatchewan.

### **“I thought my English is good, until I came to Canada”**

English is her second language. Before she came to Canada, she thought her English language skills were good enough because her undergraduate major was English language, and she passed the final examination with good marks. “I thought my English is good, until I came to Canada”. She realized she had many challenges speaking and understanding the English language among the native speakers. After a year, she gradually improved in English language fluency and she could speak up in class with a higher degree of confidence.

A non-Canadian instructor taught her first course and most of her colleagues in that class were also ISs, so she was more comfortable with everyone in that setting. In the other course she took, she was the only IS and she was nervous as a result. At that time, she realized she was not confident. In the second term, she took courses from Graduate Student Research, that are non-credit courses, and she learned how to speak up in class and built her confidence. She thought

that most instructors were not tapping into the diverse experiences that ISs brought to the University. She observed that instructors focused more on domestic students.

Emily's non-academic experience involved several volunteering activities especially during orientation periods, and it was very enjoyable for her. She also did volunteering with ISSAC and the Graduate Students Association. Also, she travelled during the winter of 2014 and during the summer of 2015. She felt she spoke English more during the trip than when she was in school, because she met people with different accents when they spoke, and she was more confident during communications.

**“With domestic students we just do the work”**

Emily thought there was little in the way of relationships between herself and the domestic students. She said domestic students were friendly only when they shared some of their opinions in class. She preferred doing group work with ISs because of the similar experiences they shared. She liked to learn new things from domestic students but unfortunately they did not get along well. “With domestic students we just do the work. During the class we gets some relationship, but after class there are almost no relationships”.

She had no clear plan of what she was going to do after study but thought of pursuing a PhD after her Master's in Canada. She said she might work for several years before going for a PhD, but she had not decided yet. “I don't have the plan yet, but hopefully, I want to have my family here”.

Her experience with faculty members was generally very positive. She was closer to her supervisor who is patient and friendly and helpful. With regard to other instructors that she took courses from she felt they were also friendly, open to any questions related to their course and they liked to listen to her ideas within and outside the class. “I can remember two professors that

I had problem with in their courses. I used to visit them often and ask a series of questions from them, and after the course I really appreciated their effort by giving them gifts”. Her experiences with non-faculty members were also good, though she did not go to their offices often. However she felt they were helpful, friendly and always tried to answer her questions if she had any.

Emily said she received no financial support and she hoped there could be more scholarships or bursaries in the College. In terms of services, accessing the library is an important part of the support she received. She was impressed with the quantity and quality of resources available through the library and the support provided by library staff.

**“It is really quiet and peaceful in Saskatoon”**

She had previous international experience from another country different from her home country before coming to Saskatoon. She was in Poland for a month as a volunteer. Her experience was casual because she did not work during her stay. For the weather, it was good compared to Saskatoon. “It was my first experience of winter and the highest was -10”. She was in California as well, which was a nice experience for her. But she liked Saskatoon compared to those two cities. “It is really quiet and peaceful in Saskatoon”.

Her recommendations were that there should be additional orientation for ISs in the College as she felt that most of the new ISs accessed information about what is going on in the College by themselves. She also recommended additional alumni relationships. She said most domestic students secured good jobs after study, but for ISs it is different because of a lack of relationships and networks. Therefore, she thought the College could create an alumni relationship that built networks for ISs. In addition, she said the College should support ISs financially, by providing scholarships or giving them the opportunity to work as teaching assistants or research assistants.

## **Faith's Voice**

### **“It is an opportunity for me to improve my English”**

Faith is an Asian student. She had many reasons that motivated her, including the fact that she met some very good friends from Saskatchewan in China and they introduced her to some professors at the U of S. She was also curious to know how studying abroad would be. “I didn’t pay attention to the U of S but when I started to look for universities in Canada, the design of the U of S website attracted me”. She was motivated by the higher quality of education in Canadian universities compared to China, so she wanted to learn more and enjoy a high quality of education in Canada where she could improve her English. “Basically it is an opportunity for me to improve my English”.

When she first came to the U of S, she had problems with the English language, but now it is better. Her academic experience was very positive, because she felt that instructors were knowledgeable and responsible. They designed examinations and assignments in a way that you would learn better. “Those are great experiences with instructors”. But with colleagues in class, her experiences so far were mixed. She thought all ISs were having challenges in terms of team projects. During discussions in team project, she sometimes had difficulty communicating her ideas very well to the other team members. “I will say the domestic students are more in charge in team projects than ISs”. She said she was not too sure if having a group with ISs would be better than domestic students, but she did not have problems with whom she has to work. The only disadvantage working with domestic students is that they are more familiar with the courses in Canadian context than ISs so they learned very fast unlike ISs. “Working with international students, we are more patient with each other and we learned at the same pace. But the disadvantage was just that we are not familiar with the Canadian context”.

Faith's non-academic experience had been fun and she had a large group of friends to spend time with in social activities. She also visited the gym and played floor hockey as well. She did some volunteer work in Regina at the Open Door Society. "It is very good for ISs to do volunteer work; this will make their social life more interesting" she advised. She is enrolled in a writing workshop where she found the teacher was very nice, and they always had supper together. She was also part of the Toastmaster club in Regina.

She had good relationships with domestic students and considered some of them to be close friends. They watched movies, went to the gym together, and went for supper sometimes. She planned to stay in Canada after her study to find a good job at least for three to five years. "I may still go to my country because there are some exciting things I am always missing in my country".

She said the instructors were supportive in the College. There are some ISs that did not like to speak up in class, and the instructors tried to make them participate in class and gave them opportunity to express their ideas. She thought from that perspective they were doing a great job. "The instructors give reasonable grades. I do not know about my classmates' grade, but I am satisfied with my grades". Five instructors taught her so far but she was closer to two of them. "Overall my academic experience is great".

She felt the non-faculty members were also supportive. They supported students regardless of your status, but she thought the non-faculty members had closer relationships with domestic students. "They chat more with domestic students than international students". In general, she thought they were supportive. Faith said she was not supported financially, but received academic and social support from faculty members and services from ISSAC and the Graduate Student Association. "They are all doing a great job to support international students".

She had lived in China all her life before coming to Saskatoon. She had no previous international experience. Nevertheless, she had friends from different countries like India, Kenya, and Estonia when she was in China.

Faith recommended that there should be additional cultural awareness training for the College and the University system. The College needed to be more reflective of different cultures and should not only use Canadian standards for every student. She also felt the College should provide better financial support for ISs. In addition, professors looking for research assistance should let all students be aware so that everyone interested can apply. She also said there should be an ISs' association within the College to connect the existing ISs with new ISs. "It would also be a great idea if the College can influence very good rapport between domestic students and international students".

### **Gideon's Voice**

Gideon is a Masters student from Asia. He was motivated because he got a scholarship to study in Canada and he felt it would be easy to immigrate and get a job in Saskatchewan. English is his second language. He studied English for more than 10 years before he came to Canada and his English has improved in Canada.

His academic experiences in the College at the U of S were very positive. He felt that instructors are good, have strong academic backgrounds and genuinely care about students' welfare. He said in China the instructors did not care about how the students are doing. His academic experience with classmates was good. "I had group work before and I learned new things".

His non-academic experiences were also generally positive as he developed a circle of friends to socialize with over supper or movies. He felt he was more independent in Canada than

China. “I was not independent in China; my parents helped me with most of the things I need to do”.

Gideon had a good relationship with domestic students within and outside the College. He liked to do group work with domestic students because they have good writing skills and they always assisted him in proofreading his paper. It was an opportunity for him to improve his English speaking by communicating with them. However, he liked to communicate with friends from China when he missed home and felt like speaking Chinese. His plan is to get a job and reside in Canada after his study.

### **“The College is supportive in all ways”**

Currently, he works as a teaching assistant in his department and works with some professors. His experiences with faculty members were very positive. “All the faculty members in my College are friendly”. He got a scholarship to study in the U of S, so he did not need additional support financially. “The College is supportive in all ways”.

He did not have any previous experience from another country before he came Saskatoon as he had never visited any country before coming to Canada. Gideon recommended that the College should provide a writing skills center for ISs and give enough hours for teaching. “I think everything is good so far”.

### **Haakon’s Voice**

#### **“I am encouraged and planning to apply for PhD after my Masters”**

Haakon is a Masters student from Africa. His motivation was because his two years’ work experience with Canadian embassy in Britain fueled his interest in wanting to learn more about Canada. He also decided on coming to pursue a Masters degree at the U of S because of the reasonable tuition fee for IS compared to what other universities with similar standings



charged. Another reason was that he had a friend that graduated from the University who recommended the school to him a long time ago before he thought of applying to study in the University.

**“I can say my experiences have been positive so far”**

His academic experiences in the college were generally positive. He said the instructors taught well and he learned many things from both the instructors and his colleagues in class. “I am encouraged and planning to apply for a PhD after completing my Masters”. He was strongly committed to personal physical fitness and appreciated the availability of gyms on campus. He was also an active member of the students’ governing association, doing lots of activity planning. He also volunteered for Statistics Canada in the just concluded population census.

He had very positive experiences as an IS in interacting with many domestic students. He had studied, lived and visited many European countries and now his experience in Canada made it clear to him that Canadian students for the most part are more receptive to foreigners than many European countries. “I have domestic students as friends that we always visit the gym together and go to bars on weekends together”.

He has been nominated by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) under the express entry scheme to apply for his Permanent Resident as a skilled immigrant. “I guess my plan to settle in Canada is well settled with this nomination”. He hopes to remain in Canada and have the opportunity to work professionally after completing his Master’s. His other plan is to continue with his studies by applying for a PhD.

His experiences with faculty members were generally positive and he felt some faculty members are willing to go an extra mile to supporting students who are not familiar with Canadian culture and learning methodologies. He said there are some other faculty members

who are not so supportive, but he thought it has to do with individual differences. “I can say my experience has been positive so far”. For the non-faculty members, he said the secretary helped him a great deal with settling in well in Canada. She was extremely supportive, took great pains to ensure he had the information he needed to settle in both academically and socially and he was extremely grateful to her on that account.

Haakon had no funding whatsoever despite his outstanding academic performance. “This is not encouraging at all as students from other universities and colleges benefit from funding”. He had previous international experience before coming to Saskatoon. He completed a degree in the United Kingdom in European studies and did a study exchange in Germany. He worked in the UK for two years after his degree before he came to Canada. He also had an opportunity to visit many other European countries like Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Netherland, Spain, France, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, Czech and Latvia. His recommended that there should be additional funding in the college, especially for students with good academic records.

### **Thematic Analysis**

A case study approach was used to collect and analyze data. A case study examines a single instance, which could be a pupil, a class, a group, a school, a community or an institution, to illuminate the wider population to which it belongs (Bosit, 2003). This case study examined experiences of internationalization at one Canadian college to illuminate experiences of a specific population of ISs at the U of S and to deepen insight into the larger process of internationalization of PSE.

The coding method appropriate for case study as preferred by Miles and Huberman 1994, is to create a provisional ‘start list’ of codes prior to fieldwork that comes from the list of research questions, hypotheses, problem areas and key variables that the researcher brings to the

study. My prior knowledge of the subject matter, information from ISSAC and the insight from the literature review helped me to create these codes which “identify a feature of the data that appears interesting to the analyst” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.7). The ‘start list’ of codes stemmed from the two basic research questions around motivation and experiences of ISs. I then re-read the transcripts a number of times and further divided the data around ISs’ experiences into additional codes to discern the main themes in the data.

### **Identification of Themes**

“Repetition is one of the easiest ways to identify themes” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 89). During the interviews some of the same ideas and concepts were repeated by a number of different participants. For example, most of my participants were motivated to study in Canada for a better quality of education so they could improve their future employment opportunities. Hardships were repeatedly discussed by most of the participants in terms of climate, language barriers, loneliness and financial need. In addition, participants were able to adjust to the host institution and society with the help of institutional supports and social networks of friends.

The abstract similarities and differences that the research questions generate can also be identified as themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Thus the themes in this research were also identified through the research questions. These research questions were:

- What are the motivations for ISs coming to study at the College of Interest at the U of S?
- What are the academic and non-academic experiences of international graduate students at the College of Interest?
- What current supports are available at the College of Interest and how are they utilized?

- What additional supports are recommended?

Although the data suggests heterogeneity among participants with respect to aspects of internationalization, clear themes also emerged from the data because of their repetition, similarities and insights the research questions generated. These included motivations, relationships, hardships, adjustments and recommendations. All the themes are connected and illustrate different aspects of international graduate students' experiences.

### **Motivations**

Motivation is the first theme that emerged as an explanation for the choices and decisions made by the ISs who participated in the research. These motivations involved a combination of push and pull factors, including a desire for self-improvement through accessing English language graduate level education, interest in Canada, the spirit of adventure and aspirations to become a citizen of Canada. Adiam was attracted to study at the U of S to access a better quality of education and to challenge herself to further what she knew. Blair was motivated because he wanted a better life and friends encouraged him. Carson was motivated by the reasonable tuition charged at the U of S compared with other universities in Canada. Her brother who lived in Saskatoon for ten years motivated Dana. Emily was motivated by the reputation of the U of S as one of the 15 best post-secondary institutions in Canada. Faith was motivated by the design of the U of S website and perceptions of the quality of education in Canada. Gideon was motivated by the scholarship he got to study in Canada, and Haakon was motivated by his two years' work experience with the Canadian embassy in Britain. Regardless of their disparate motivations, all the participants ultimately made the decision to study at the U of S and to develop relationships with and within that host institution.

## **Relationships**

Another theme identified in the data is relationships existing among and between ISs, domestic students, faculty members, non-faculty members, and the non- university population. Participants generally spoke highly of the responsiveness of faculty and the quality of education they provided. But many felt that some Canadian-born faculty were not adequately prepared to cope with the idiosyncratic needs of ISs. Many participants identified a need for enhanced cross-cultural training and greater diversity between Canadian and non-Canadian born academics on faculty. Participants also felt that non-faculty and support staff had greater challenges in dealing with international than domestic students. For example, although Faith thought faculty were generally supportive she said non- faculty members have closer relationships with domestic students. “They chat more with domestic students than international students”. Some participants were able to establish close personal relationships with domestic students, but this seems to be the exception rather than the rule. Carson felt that domestic students communicate well in class but are only willing to share during the teaching and learning process. “With domestic students we just do the work during the class: after class there is no relationship”. Despite this, many participants preferred engaging in team work with domestic students because they have good writing skills, they assisted in proofreading term papers, and it is an opportunity for ISs to improve their English by communicating with them. Many participants felt Canadian culture is very individualistic, making it difficult to establish close relations between culturally different people. As a result, ISs tend to socialize within their own group, preventing the deep cross-cultural learning envisaged by genuine internationalization of post-secondary landscapes (Abiddin, 2007).

## **Hardships**

The theme of hardships included language barriers, culture shock, different learning styles, loneliness and climate, all of which were identified as major difficulties for participants. Although most participants felt they had strong English language proficiency before coming to Canada, many realized their limitations upon arrival. This impacted both their academic success and their capacity to develop meaningful relationships, and it was particularly challenging if they were the only IS in a class. For example, Emily took a course in her first term where she was the only IS and she was nervous for the entire duration of the class because of her English proficiency. Difficulty communicating both inside and outside the academic environment also contributed to the culture shock experienced by many participants, resulting in a sense of confusion about appropriate norms and behavior and feelings of isolation and loneliness, especially in the initial stages of their adjustment to Saskatoon. Similar challenges were articulated by other participants, reinforcing insights from the research literature around the importance of language proficiency to the success of ISs. On an optimistic note all participants indicated that their English language proficiency improved dramatically during their first year in Canada, contributing to greater academic success and reducing social isolation and feelings of culture shock.

Weather is another critical factor impacting the experiences of ISs in this particular context. All the participants complained about the Saskatoon weather. Haakon had visited many European countries and he liked Canada but the weather during the winter period in Saskatoon was a source of great difficulty. Emily also said it is really quiet and peaceful in Saskatoon but the extreme cold is difficult to adjust to. More than anything, she suggested it was the weather

that caused her to occasionally consider going home. Clearly, climatic factors are a source of hardship particularly acute in this context.

### **Adjustments**

The necessity for ISs to undertake multiple adjustments is another clear theme identified through data analysis. These adjustments include academic, non-academic, social, cultural, linguistic and spiritual. Many of the participants came from countries where post-secondary education occurred in an extremely hierarchical environment characterized by significant power difference between professors and students. In contrast, many instructors in the College of Interest employed non-hierarchical approaches, promoted co-construction of knowledge and encouraged student voice and collaborative learning. For many participants, especially those from China, this was one of the greatest sources of culture shock requiring significant adjustments in the Canadian context.

Other adjustments identified by participants included the previously mentioned adaptation to the extreme Canadian climate, developing a sense of independence and agency for those students who previously had been cared for by parents and families, becoming accustomed to life without close family members or even people from one's own culture, becoming accustomed to different foods, gaining understanding and knowledge of Canadian history and politics, especially the status of Indigenous people, and for some participants becoming comfortable in a culture with very different values around gender norms, relations and identity.

### **Recommendations**

A major focus of this research was to better understand the experiences of ISs in a particular context in order to delineate recommendations to improve the overall quality of that experience. Participants eagerly shared their opinions and offered recommendations relating to

academic and social matters and the long term career support of ISs. All of the participants expressed high levels of satisfaction with the quality of education received in the College but also felt that there was room for improvement. Greater cross-cultural preparation for faculty and support staff, intentionally increasing the diversity of the academy by hiring non-Canadian born faculty and better preparation for domestic students to engage with international peers were chief among these recommendations. Almost without fail participants identified inadequate financial support as major barrier for ISs and recommended that enhanced supports be made available either through bursaries or expanded opportunities to perform research or other support services.

Participants were motivated to study at the college primarily to earn academic credentials; they were also eager to improve their English language proficiency, to learn about Canada and its culture and to engage with the social aspects of the host society. Most suggested greater satisfaction with realizing their academic rather than cultural or social goals and identified a lack of processes and structures which would facilitate the interaction of international and domestic students for reciprocal learning and growth. Faith recommended that there should be a students' association within the College to connect existing ISs with ISs and with domestic students. She remarked, "It would also be a great idea if the College can build very good rapport between domestic students and international students."

Similarly many participants expressed frustration at the lack of opportunities and structures to enable deeper interaction between ISs and the wider community in the host context. Those participants who aspired to remain in Canada to develop a professional career especially lamented the lack of networking opportunities with university alumni or employers which are critical to career advancement.



### Motivations

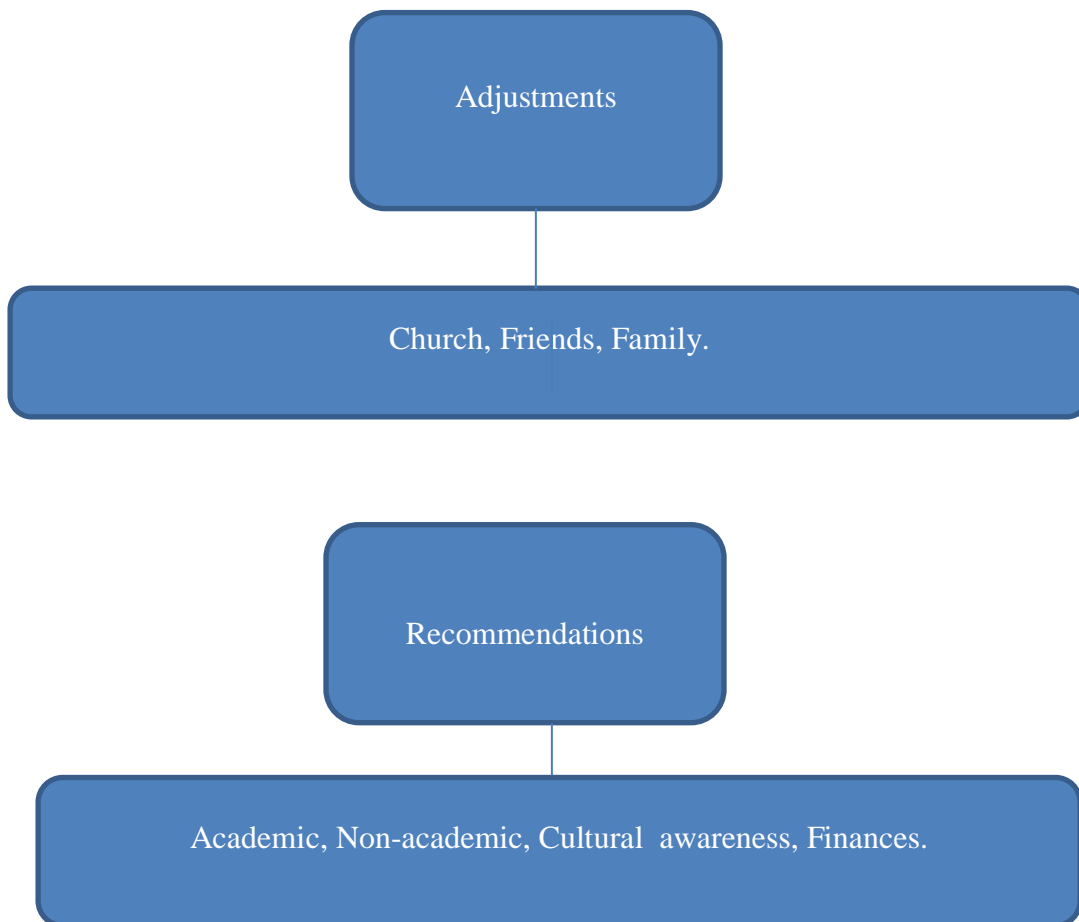
Push/pull factor, Self-improvement, Gain Credentials, Emigrate to Canada, English Improvement, Interest in Canada, and Adventure

### Relationships

International students, Domestic student, Faculty members, Non-faculty Members, Non- University population

### Hardships

Language barrier, Culture shock, Learning styles, Loneliness, Climate,



*Figure 4.1.* Themes connected illustrating different aspects of international graduate students' experiences.

### **Conclusion/Summary**

By employing case study methodology to collect qualitative data from eight international graduate students in Canadian College, a deeper understanding of their experiences was achieved. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and motivations of ISs on academic and non-academic matters. I transcribed the interviews and this written text, together with the tape recording, was the basis for the subsequent data analysis and meaning making. To ensure that the interview is productive as possible, researchers must

possess a collection of skills to ensure that comprehensive and representative data collected during the interview (Gill et al., 2008). One of the most important skills the researcher possessed during the interview was the ability to listen attentively to what the participants said. This allowed the participants to recount their experiences as fully as possible, without unnecessary interruptions. Other skills used by the researcher was reflecting on remarks made by participants, and seeking clarification from participants if their response is unclear. The data collected from the interviews were organized and sorted through the process of coding for the identification of themes. The themes of Motivations, Relationships, Hardships, Adjustments and Recommendations emerged from the data analysis, because of their repetition, and similarities.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Discussion of Findings**

This chapter reviews the themes emerging from data analysis, presents the main findings regarding the experiences of ISs and offers recommendations on evidence-based decision-making around interfacing with IS at the U of S. The discussion of the findings emerges from the themes identified through data analysis and coding. As presented in Chapter Four these include motivations, relationships, hardships, adjustments and recommendations. Findings are derived by aligning these themes with the larger research literature on internationalization synthesized in the literature review in Chapter Two. Additional insights are derived from my own experiences as an IS and the application of these insights to the research questions as an emic researcher.

### **Implications of Motivations**

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two suggested that IS are motivated significantly by push and pull factors. This was confirmed by the findings of this research as the participants articulated a variety of different motivations for their decisions and choices. Push factors compel a person or group to migrate due to low productivity, unemployment and underdevelopment, violence, war, or poor quality of life to leave a particular place. Blair said his country has been at war for a long time, and he was in the refugee camp when he decided he wanted a better life. Carson had a plan to reside in Canada after study and look for work, because there are no job opportunities or security in his country, and Canada offers a better quality of life. Faith was motivated by the higher quality of education in Canadian universities than China, so she wanted to learn more and enjoy the quality of education in Canada. Pull factors are possibilities of accessing better education, employment, higher wages, facilities, security, better working

conditions including salary and status, attractive amenities, and family reunions that encourage a person to relocate to a new place (Thet, 2000). Pull factors were also evident among participants, and, though individual priorities varied, they were all motivated to acquire a better life through a quality education in a new context. One participant was attracted to study at the U of S for better quality of education and to challenge herself to further what she knew. Others were motivated by a desire for a better life. Reasonable tuition fees at U of S compared with other universities in Canada was an additional inducement as was the institutional reputation and ranking of the U of S. Financial support in the form of scholarships was also a consideration for participants. But in general participants were motivated by a desire to achieve a better life and saw graduation programs at the U of S as a means to achieve that better life.

Different participants had different definitions of precisely what that good life looked like. For 10% of participants, that good life was envisaged by returning to their home country and acquiring a well-paying and high status position. By contributing to the realization of that aspiration, the U of S may be seen as facilitating both individual and structural development in participants' countries of origin. Significantly, however, a large proportion (90%) of participants aspired to create a new life in Canada after completing their studies at the U of S. Thus, the decision to study at the U of S was part of a larger strategy of relocation and Canadian citizenship acquisition, and while representing a brain gain to Canada, clearly constituted brain drain from the countries of origin. In the literature review, Chirkov (2009) hypothesized that ISs with self-determined motivation to study abroad would experience fewer obstacles in cultural adaptation than those with non-self-determined motivation. It was evident that all of the participants had self-determined motivation to study at the U of S and ultimately this was a significant factor in their successful adjustment and integration.

The literature reviewed suggested that country and university attributes are highly significant both in motivating ISs to choose to study abroad and in their choice of destination (Thet, 2000). As just mentioned 90 % of participants wished to acquire Canadian citizenship and this was as important a factor in their decision making as the choice of a specific institution to study at. Four participants were attracted to the physical beauty of Canada and these participants identified the structures and facilities of the U of S as significant enticements. According to Chirkov (2009) and Zhou (2012), the attractiveness of host institutions may influence ISs' choice of a university. Thus the possibility of acquiring Canadian citizenship and the U o S' physical features are highly significant motivations for my participants, which correlates with the literature reviewed. A related consideration for many of the participants was their perception that they would receive a good quality of education, from an institution with a prestigious reputation at a more affordable cost than many other Canadian or North American institutions of similar ranking. So institutional reputation, ranking and affordable tuition were also significant pull factors for many of the participants. Some had acquired even more specific information on the Saskatoon context, and appreciated the affordable cost of living and the perceived safety of Saskatoon as a destination for newcomers.

### **Implications of Relationships**

Relationships emerged as a powerful theme in data analysis. These include relationships between IS and the homes and families they left behind, relationships between ISs and domestic students at the U of S, relationships between different groups of ISs, relationships between ISs and faculty and staff, and relationships between ISs and the wider Saskatoon and Canadian environment. Indeed, the process of internationalization of PSE portrayed in this research is

centered on the establishment of new relationships and, simultaneously, the maintenance or attenuation of old relationships. (Covin & Miller 2014).

Research synthesized in the literature review highlighted relationships with faculty as critical to successful adjustment for ISs (Andrade, 2006). Data provided by participants confirm that this is also true for this case study. In general, participants found faculty members to be supportive to ISs, both inside and outside the academic environment. Many participants also appreciated the respect showed to them by the faculty, the informality and non-hierarchical nature of relationships with faculty, the overall quality of instruction and the student-centered perspective provided by faculty, the willingness of faculty to provide extra time or instruction for those ISs needing it and the openness of most faculty to students from different cultures. However, while most participants articulated general approval and appreciation of their relationships with faculty, and rated their educational experience very positively, reservations also emerged in the data. Some participants suggested that some faculty did not have sufficient cross-cultural competence to work well with ISs. While there was no evidence in the data that these ISs experienced racism or discrimination from faculty, some participants felt that Canadian faculty were not sufficiently aware of the unique challenges faced by ISs and consequently were unable to adapt their instructional or relational approaches in appropriate and necessary ways. As an explanation for this challenge, participants noted that a very small percentage of faculty in the College of Interest come from international backgrounds and participants were unanimous in suggesting that a greater percentage of non-Canadian born faculty would assist with advancing internationalization and creating a more congenial climate for ISs at the College of Interest and more widely at the U of S. Participants were also unanimous in asserting that non-faculty staff

were more comfortable interacting with domestic students than ISs were, suggesting a need for additional professional development among support staff.

Research on internationalization points to the significant benefits derived by domestic students from the presence of ISs at their institutions and in their classes, suggesting that ISs enhance the learning experience for all domestic students (Chakma, 2010). Data from participants indicate that they learn much from domestic students on a daily basis. However, during data collection it was discovered that in the College of Interest domestic and ISs have lack of opportunity to interact with each other, limiting the potential benefits from the increased cultural diversity within the institution. Nevertheless, two of my participants who are female preferred teamwork with domestic students; they thought it was an opportunity for them to improve their English proficiency. The literature reviewed suggests that responsibility for integration lies not only with the ISs, but also with the host universities by connecting existing ISs with new ISs in meaningful and systematic ways (Abiddin, 2007). This facilitates greater interaction between domestic and ISs for the benefit of both.

Most of the participants were able to adjust in large part because they were able to establish positive relationships in the new environment and continue to derive needed support through continued relationships with family and friends in their countries of origin. However, it appears from this research that Chinese students were able to adjust more quickly than other ISs, in large part because the population of Chinese students at the U of S is much higher than other international groups and consequently their greater sense of community was able to provide more tangible cultural and emotional supports to enable adjustment. Conversely, however, Chinese participants indicated the lowest ability to develop meaningful relationships either with other international or domestic students, or with members of the wider host community.



### **Implications of Hardships**

Participants have different experiences in terms of hardships. The literature reviewed suggested that language barriers pose the greatest difficulty for ISs and are likely to affect ISs' academic performance (Jochems, et al., 2010). Three Chinese participants experienced language barriers that affected their academic performance, but all participants indicated that their English language proficiency increased significantly because of the immersion experience. This confirms the huge benefits derived by ISs from the internationalization experience, but also confirms that those benefits are not achieved without struggle and dissonance.

In my findings, all the participants experienced culture shock. They had the experience of leaving cultures where they were completely familiar with social and academic norms and coming to a site where they were not entirely aware of what is appropriate and how things are done in the college, university, city and country. Nevertheless, it was also a great opportunity for them to learn and acquire new knowledge. For example, one of the participants said the experiences were sad but also positive, because it was a blessing that he came to study at a Canadian College. The literature reviewed revealed that some ISs adapt more quickly and some need a longer time to get adjusted, but most people overcome the difficulty if they perceive the new reality as better (Guanipa, 1998).

Financial difficulty was another challenge ISs frequently faced, most especially those who are solely responsible for funding themselves. Most of the participants experienced financial difficulty. Previous research had shown that financial pressures are the leading source of anxiety amongst ISs (Sherry & Chui 2010). One of my participants said her College provided a bursary for her that was intended to pay tuition, but it was not enough to cover her entire tuition. Participants noted that the Canadian Government implemented a new policy in 2014 that allowed

ISs to work part-time while studying, but with a restriction of 20 hours per week (Tannis, Personal Communication 2015). This provided greater opportunities for IS, but imposed restrictions, as many employers would prefer employees who can work full time (Tannis, Personal Communication, 2015)

Weather was another hardship faced by ISs in this case study. All my participants complained about the Saskatoon weather. One of my participants from Nigeria had visited many European counties. Although he likes Canada, he felt the weather during the winter period in Saskatoon posed great difficulty for him. A Chinese participant also said it was really quiet and peaceful in Saskatoon but the winter period was bad and sometimes made her feel lazy to study and affected her grades. As an IS that came from Nigeria during the extreme winter climate, the weather was also a difficulty for me physically and academically.

A survey conducted in 2007 by Statistics Canada asked immigrants what they disliked the most about living in Canada; 27% percent said climate, and 16% said Canada's weather was their greatest challenge. Climate was also identified as a greater challenge than lack of job opportunities (Chakma, 2010). Participants were able to cope with the weather by getting opportunities. The implications for U of S are that most ISs are scared of residing in Saskatoon after completing their studies because of the extreme winter. The weather also interfered with ISs' study habits and affected their ability to get good grades. This finding suggested the need for the U of S to do a better job both in preparing ISs for the Saskatchewan climate and in assisting those students in adjusting once they encounter their first Canadian winter.

### **Implications of Adjustments**

The necessity for ISs to undertake multiple adjustments is another clear theme identified through data analysis. These adjustments include academic, non-academic, social, cultural,

linguistic and spiritual. The participants confessed that most the faculty members are supportive socially and academically but that in many cases pedagogical approaches were very different from what they were accustomed to in their home countries. The literature reviewed suggested that most faculty members are aware of the increasing diversity among students, but often are not prepared and trained to deal with them (Bartell, 2003). From my findings it was evident that faculty members are ready to support ISs but that not all are well-equipped to do so in a competent way. One of the participants said there was a time she was frustrated with her supervisor, but later realized the supervisor wanted the best out of her. She is now comfortable in the area of research because of the supervisor's support. Social, cultural, and dietary changes, different approaches and norms around gender and identity and overcoming extreme loneliness from being separated from family were additional adjustments identified by participants.

### **Implications of Recommendations**

Although participants appreciated the supports they received from the College, they recommended additional supports that should be taken into consideration at the Canadian College to ensure a smoother adjustment for ISs and maximize their prospects for success. Most of the participants recommended additional support financially for ISs. One of the participants recommended that there should be a students' association within the College to connect the existing ISs with new ISs. One of the participants also said, "It would also be great idea if the College can build very good rapport between domestic students and ISs".

The literature reviewed suggested that ISs must take the initiative in overcoming culture shock by proactively learning as much as possible about the host society and establishing relationships to assist in their adjustment (Abiddin, 2007). However, it is also the responsibility of the host institution to ensure that ISs are fully engaged in the host society academically, socio-

economically, politically or culturally. Faculty members and support staff play critical roles in supporting ISs to be successful academically and personally. With this, the U of S can maximize the advantages and minimize the challenges of internationalization.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of eight international graduate students in a Canadian College through a case study approach based on personal interviews. Themes emerging from data included Motivations, Relationships, Adjustments, Hardships and Recommendations. The portrait of internationalization emerging from this study highlights the centrality of human behavior and social interactions. Participants were drawn from a variety of countries of origin, with students from China predominating. These ISs are motivated by a range of push and pull factors, with institutional reputation and affordable tuition predominating; and a significant percentage aspired to remain in Canada and access employment and Canadian citizenship after graduation. Relationships of a multifaceted nature figured prominently in the findings emerging from the data. These included relationships that participants had with faculty and support staff, with domestic students and with the wider Saskatoon community outside the University. On balance, participants spoke positively about those relationships and framed the University and College as appreciative and supportive spaces for ISs. However, participants also offered recommendations on ways in which the experiences of ISs could be enhanced. In particular it was noted that greater cross-cultural awareness (possibly by hiring more international faculty) would substantially enhance the academic experiences of ISs. Participants further noted an even greater need for improved capacity in working with culturally different students among support staff and they identified relationships between international and domestic students as in need of significant enhancement. Participants

reported challenges in their adjustment to the U of S, with culture shock, language and financial difficulties being most common.

Many of the themes emerging from the data align closely with broader insights into the experiences of ISs synthesized in the literature review in Chapter Two. In this regard, participants' experiences were typical of ISs at other North American institutions, suggesting that many aspects of the internationalization are not context specific. What distinguished participants in this case study, however, was the additional difficulty many experienced in adjusting to the harsh Western Canadian winter climate. From this it can be concluded that extreme climate is a phenomenon unique to post-secondary institutions in this region, warranting greater institutional consideration as a feature of the U of S internationalization strategy.

### **Recommendations**

- The College should provide additional financial support for ISs, as scarcity of funding is one of the greatest impediments to the academic success and social adjustment of ISs.
- The College should provide additional professional development in the area of cross-cultural competency to faculty and support staff. The College should also consider hiring additional non-Canadian faculty to create a more supportive climate for ISs.
- There should be services from the College and University and supporting structures in place to enable ISs to be more included in campus life and more active in social activities. The College and University should also create more events, in which ISs can join and interact with other people from different cultures and prepare faculty and domestic students to interact with ISs.
- Ideally, international and domestic students can serve as a resource for each other, using their different experiences to see issues from multiple perspectives. Instructors should

encourage students to work in multicultural groups and provide assessment tasks where different cultural knowledge is required in order for all students to broaden their cultural knowledge and experiences.

For further research, additional areas that need to be considered are:

- Experiences of international students in other colleges at the University of Saskatchewan
- Career paths of international students who graduate from the University of Saskatchewan who remain in Canada and who return to their homelands.

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*Appendix A*

**INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS**

**Thesis Title: Understanding the experiences of International Graduate Students  
in a Canadian Colleges**

**Olawunmi Adeyemi**

**Department of Educational Administration**

**College of Education**

**University of Saskatchewan**

**Email: ofa109@mail.sask.ca**

May 08, 2015

Dear (Name of Participants)

Re: Intent to conduct research study

My name is Olawunmi Adeyemi. I am a M.Ed. student at the Department of Educational Administration in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. I am conducting a research on experiences of international students who came directly to college at the University of Saskatchewan, for graduate studies.

Interviews will be conducted as part of a research study to increase my understanding on experiences of international students within and outside the academic environments. If you decide to participate, an interview would be arranged at a time and place of your convenience. The interview would last about 30 minutes, during this interview, I will be asking questions to find out about the academic and non-academic experiences of international graduate students in the colleges at University of Saskatchewan, the kind of relationship that exists between Canadian students and international students in the colleges, the motivations of international graduate students for choosing University of Saskatchewan and so on.

I would also like to know more about what you like and do not like in your college and what changes you would hope for the future. Some personal data will be collected from you such as your age, race, and educational background. The information will be kept private and confidential. Participants will be given a Pseudonym. Participants are welcome to choose their pseudonym and identifiable information will never be used in any publication or presentation. I will not, under any circumstances pass on your details to any organization or company. This is a research for academic purposes only and is not connected with the government.

There are no rights or wrong answers, what is important are your opinions. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the research at any time or not answer questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.

If you have any further questions about the research, please feel free to contact me via email at ofa109@mail.usask.ca or on my mobile at 6399980125. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Olawunmi Adeyemi

## *Appendix B*

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS**

- What are your motivations for choosing the University of Saskatchewan?
- How much experience of English proficiency do international students have before coming to college at University of Saskatchewan?
- Describe your academic experiences in your college at University of Saskatchewan?
- What are the non-academic experiences of international graduate students in the colleges?
- What kind of relationships exists between Canadian students and international students in the colleges?
- What are the future plans of international students to reside in Canada after study?
- What are the experiences of international students working with different faculty members?
- Describe your experiences with non-faculty support. If not, what will be the benefit of a designated non -faculty support person for international students?
- What kind of supports or services is available for international graduate students
- What kind of recommendations can international students make to enhance supports within their college?
- Did international graduate students have previous international experience from another country different from their home country before coming to Saskatoon?

*Appendix C*  
**CONSENT FORM**

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a study titled “Understanding the experiences of international graduate students in colleges at University of Saskatchewan” Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions.

**Researcher**

I am Olawunmi Adeyemi M.Ed student, Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, (639) 998-0125: ofa109@mail.usask.ca

**Purpose and Procedure**

The title of my research is: Understanding experiences of international graduate student in the Colleges at University of Saskatchewan. The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences (academic and non-academic) and motivations of international graduate students in the colleges. I will conduct semi-structured individual interviews with selected international students who came directly to colleges for graduate studies. Semi-structured individual interview questions are attached for your review and it will last for 1.5 hours each. After receiving written consent, I will contact you and arrange a convenient time and location for interviews. With your permission, I will tape the interview and later transcribe the interview.

**Risks and Discomforts**

There are no known risks and discomfort associated with this research. Participants are permitted to answer only those questions they are comfortable with.

**Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be penalized in any way

should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study. If you wish to withdraw from the study, any data which you had provided would be destroyed and will not be used in the study.

### **Ethics Approval**

To protect participants' emotional and physical harm, Ethics approval has been secured from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board.

### **Protection of Confidentiality**

Your identity will not be revealed in any publication resulting from this study. There will be maximum effort to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Each participant will be given a Pseudonym. Participants are welcome to choose their pseudonym. Identifying information about the participant, school, ethnic group and department will be removed.

### **Questions**

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact me:

Olawunmi Adeyemi

Educational Administration

College of Education,

University of Saskatchewan

28 Campus Drive

Saskatoon, SK, S7N 0X1

(639) 9980125

Ofa109@mail.usask.ca

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give my consent to participate in this study.

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_